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Thomas Kaffenberger
University of Fribourg, Department of Art History

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A forgotten Dominican Monastery in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Ruined Site '*in contrata de Morfi*' in Famagusta, Cyprus

THOMAS KAFFENBERGER

University of Fribourg, Department of Art History

Among the least-studied of the approximately 30 churches and church ruins within the city walls of old Famagusta, the most important harbor city of medieval Cyprus, is the site, which came to be known as Agia Fotou at an unknown point in the post-medieval period.¹ It is located in the north-eastern quarter of the fortified old town, today a hardly developed or investigated area. Already in the 19th century, this building complex was largely reduced to a pile of debris; and all that remains today are foundations, one standing wall with two windows and a vaulted cellar (**Fig. 1**). In the first part of this article, the fragmentary built remains will receive a thorough investigation for the first time after previously hidden foundations of the church and monastic buildings were (unprofessionally) uncovered in 2010–11.² A previous

¹ On medieval Famagusta in general several recent edited volumes: Coureas, Edbury, Walsh 2012; Weyl Carr 2014; Coureas, Kiss, Walsh 2014; Walsh 2019.

² I am indebted to Michael Walsh for sharing with me some pictures of the site right after the clearing and to my father, Dieter Kaffenberger, for assisting in drawing a measured plan in rapidly fading daylight in 2013 – by now, the ruin is overgrown once more and the creation of both, good pictures and plans, would be near impossible. Furthermore, I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for detailed and important observations, which helped me to rethink and refine the article substantially.

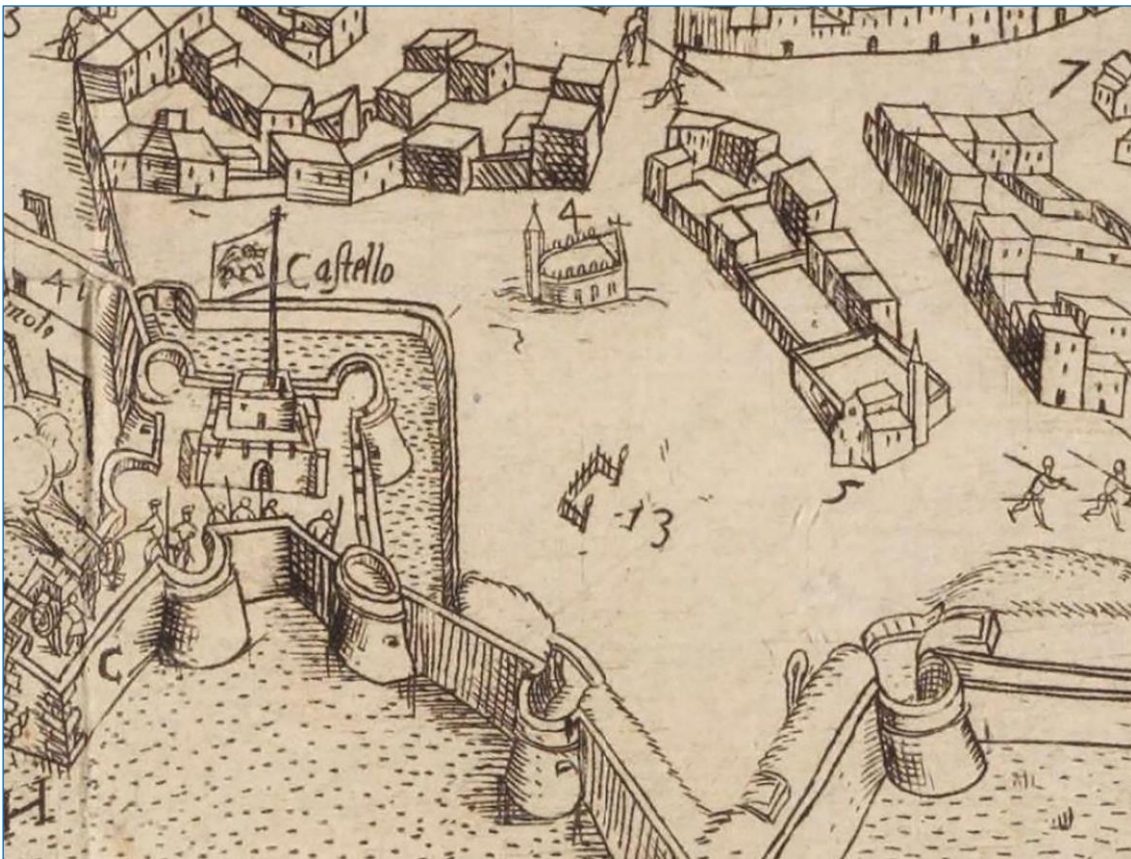


Figure 1 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery from South, foundations of the church in the foreground (state in 2013). Photo: author.

excavation of the site, executed in 1938 by Theophilus Mogabgab, was never published.³

The only historic pictorial source, which can be linked to the ruin, is the important engraving of the siege of Famagusta, made by the Venetian Stefano

³ Mentioned in the Report of the Department of Antiquities for the years 1937–1939 (Megaw 1951), p. 176; Mogabgab 1951, p. 186). Evidently this excavation had already disturbed all stratigraphy around the ruin and was not documented or published according to scientific standards.



Figures 2, 3 Stefano Gibellino, *Engraving of the Siege of Famagusta* (1571) overall and detail: 4 *San Giorgio*, 5 *San Dominico*, 13 *loco di trar al palio'*.

Photo: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Gibellino in 1571 (**Fig. 2, 3**).⁴ Here, a church building is depicted in the same area of the city, where the ruins are located. The primary value of Gibellino's engraving, apart from the evident interest for military historians, lies in the captions, which provide the names of some of the depicted buildings. The church in question is identified as "San Dominico" – and it is, despite being rather generic in its depiction, shown with an adjoining cloister. On a first glance, this would naturally prompt us to assume this building to be a monastery of the Dominican order. The first scholar to discuss the ruined structure was, as with so many sites in Cyprus, Camille Enlart in 1899.⁵ Despite being aware of Gibellino's drawing, he suggested identifying the church as that of Saint Clare. This was followed by a number of later scholars, most recently Margit Mersch.⁶ More recently, though, several scholars put forward the identification as Dominican monastery: Catherine Otten-Froux, Michalis Olympios, and Chris Schabel (who gives a list of 14th-century documents referring to the monastery).⁷ This article proposes an investigation of the issue of identification and dating based on the material remains on site, a thorough discussion of which will form the first part of the study. In the second part, we will then come back to a more informed evaluation of the known textual and material evidence, which make clear that an identification as the main Dominican house of Famagusta is by far the most likely, though not without problems.

⁴ Stylianou, Stylianou 1980, p. 54; Otten-Froux 2006, pp. 109–120; Mersch 2014, pp. 242–243.

⁵ Enlart 1899, pp. 377–379

⁶ Mersch 2014.

⁷ Otten-Froux 2001, p. 148 ; Olympios 2014a, p. 71, Schabel 2020, p. 351.

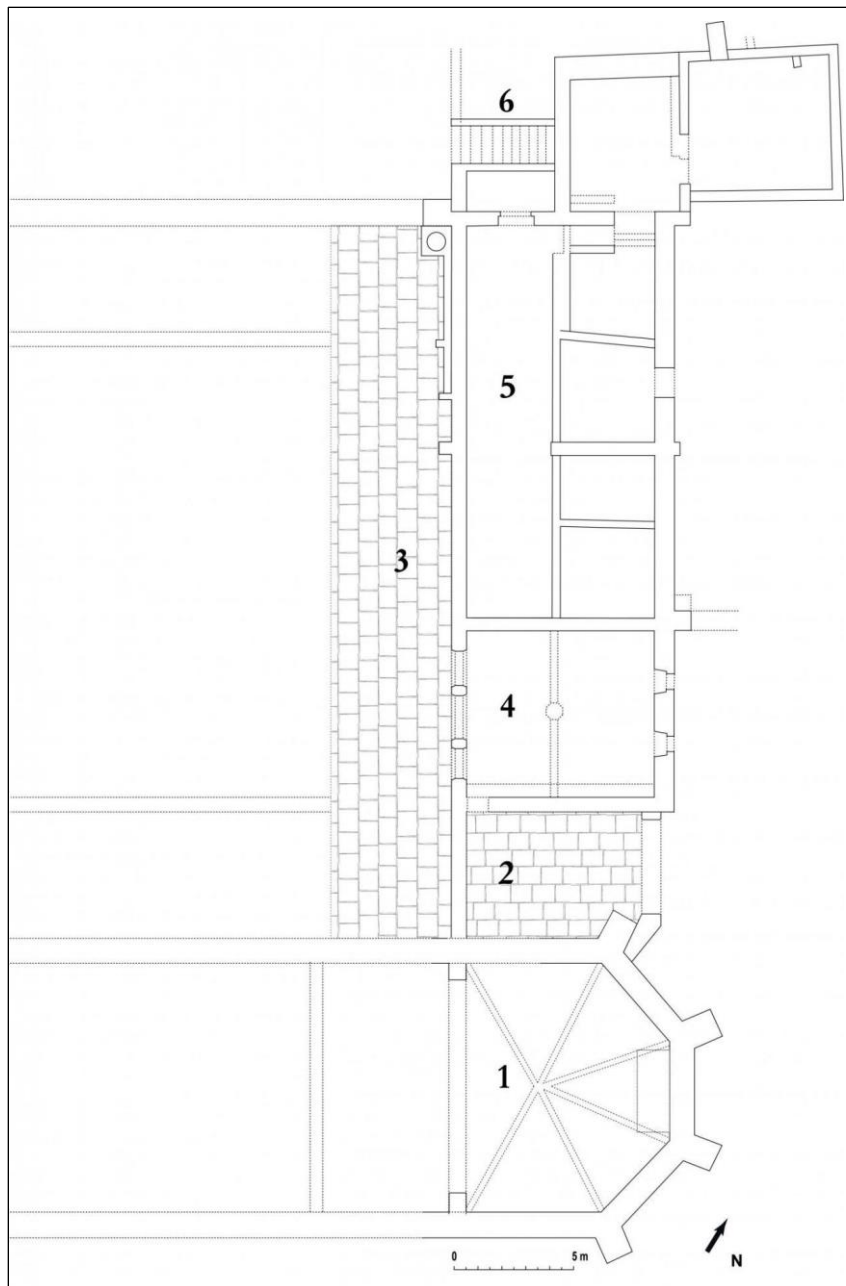


Figure 4 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Ground Plan (author).

- 1: Church;
- 2: Chapel (?);
- 3 Cloister;
- 4: Chapter House;
- 5: Large Hall (later subdivided);
- 6: Stairs to Cellar.

1. Material evidence: the built remains

In this part of the study, the material remains on site will be presented to gather as much evidence as possible concerning the original layout and

design of the church and the adjoining monastic buildings (**Fig. 4**). It must be stressed that results presented here can only be preliminary, as the state of the ruin is highly fragmentary, the entire western half of the complex still remains underground, and no professional excavation of the visible parts has been undertaken.⁸ The latter comprise the eastern wing of the former cloister with its

⁸ Due to the Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus, including Famagusta, archaeological excavations in this area are formally prohibited. Thus, the remaining parts of the complex will most

adjoining rooms. To the north, a vaulted cellar accessible from the cloister area has been preserved, and, to the south, the choir of the former church can be located.



Figure 5 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery from South, foundations of the church in the foreground (state in 2010). Photo: Michael J.K. Walsh, 2010.

1.1 The Church

Of the church choir, the lower two-to-three stone layers remain (**Fig. 5**). They form a regularly conceived three-sided polygonal structure (a rather flat 3/8-polygon) of around 9.20 m total width. Each polygon corner is occupied by a diagonally placed, rectangular buttress. Inside, the wide foundation of a stone altar block is

likely not be uncovered anytime soon; enough reason to justify this preliminary evaluation of the continuously deteriorating site.

discernible, placed directly against the eastern wall.⁹ Further west, two protruding foundations seem to delimit the rectangular choir bay, with around 5.50 m approximately twice as deep as the flat polygon itself (around 2.80 m depth). This choir shape could also be interpreted as a 5/8-polygon, even if the lateral walls of the choir bay are longer than the polygon sides.

Unlike in most other cases, where his analysis is very precise and clear, Enlart's early description of the "Agia Fotou ruin" is problematic in several aspects.¹⁰ He speaks of a rather small chapel of two bays, 12.50 m by 7.50 m, with a polygonal choir oriented north-east (**Fig. 6**). He continues with mentioning the cellar, at a right angle to the chapel and nearby the latter's choir. This description does not fit the evidence on site today: while the polygonal choir is oriented north-east indeed, and only slightly larger than the chapel described by Enlart, it is parallel to the vaulted cellar, which is oriented north-east as well. This reveals a contradiction within Enlart's description, an apparent mistake on his part, perhaps caused by the much-deteriorated state of the buildings, or simply by a certain lack of interest in this specific building. It appears that he would have drawn the church plan that he added to his description only later, when back in France, and not on site: he could have easily remarked the discrepancies. Among the latter should be mentioned that he

⁹ Olympios 2014a, p. 71.

¹⁰ Enlart 1899, p. 378. On the discrepancies between his text and the material evidence also Mersch 2014, p. 258.

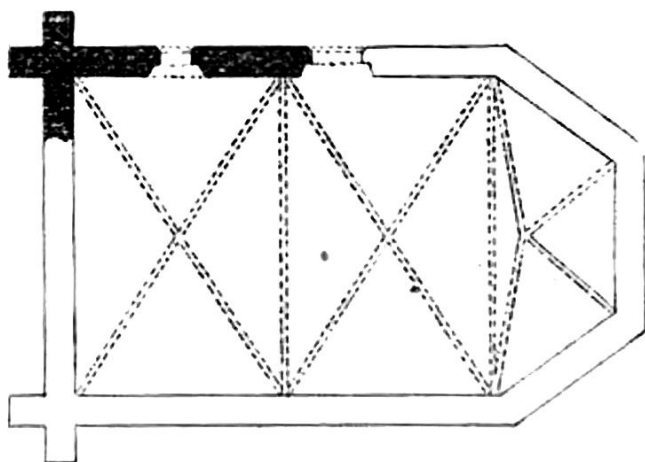


Figure 6 Famagusta,
Ground Plan of the “Chapel
of St. Clare,” erroneous
reconstruction of Camille
Enlart.
Plan: Enlart 1899.



Figure 7 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery from East.
Photo: Camille Enlart, 1896 (Collection of the CVAR, Nicosia).

describes the chapel as being built without buttresses – evidently not true – and that he marks only a part of the western bay, not of the polygon as still standing.

The latter gives us a hint towards the possible origin of the misunderstanding. The only still-extant wall is the western wall of the former chapter house, which will be discussed in more detail below. This wall, seen together with the only part of the polygon still remaining around 1900 – the northern diagonal buttress, emerging from a large heap of rubble – could have potentially been mistaken for a small chapel as drawn by Enlart (**Fig. 7**). Furthermore, when he describes the chapel's windows as "only chamfered on the inside," this fits the windows of the remaining wall.¹¹ Later on he seems to have noticed that the chapel should have been oriented north-east if following the usual pattern of a monastic compound, creating the apparent discrepancies in the description.

Be this as it may, we know now that the description is of little use for a reconstruction of the general design of the church. Instead, we need to rely on the uncovered foundations and the few pictures remaining from the 1930s campaigns (**Fig. 8**). The fragments of moulded architectural elements, dispersed within the ruin, can be of further help.

The general shape of the choir is rather evident; the foundations prove that it was polygonal and – as indicated by the buttresses – vaulted. The latter aspect is rather unsurprising: despite a certain tendency of mendicant orders to leave their

¹¹ Enlart 1899, p. 378: "[...] ses fenêtres en tiers-point étaient ébrasées au dedans seulement et large de 70 centimètres."



Figure 8 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery from South-East, remains of the church in the foreground (state in 1939). Photo: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.

church naves
unvaulted (we
will come back to
this issue below),
vaulted choirs

are more or less ubiquitous.¹² A vaulted, three-sided choir polygon fits also with ease into the group of well-known or preserved mendicant churches on the island (**Fig. 9**). While the Franciscan Church in Famagusta, built before 1300, shows a very deep three-sided polygon (**Fig. 10**), the choir proportions of the Augustinian Church in Nicosia (1320s, **Fig. 11**) and the Carmelite Church in Famagusta (1325–1330, **Fig. 12**)

¹² Biebrach 1908; Schenkluhn 2000, *passim*; Mersch 2009.

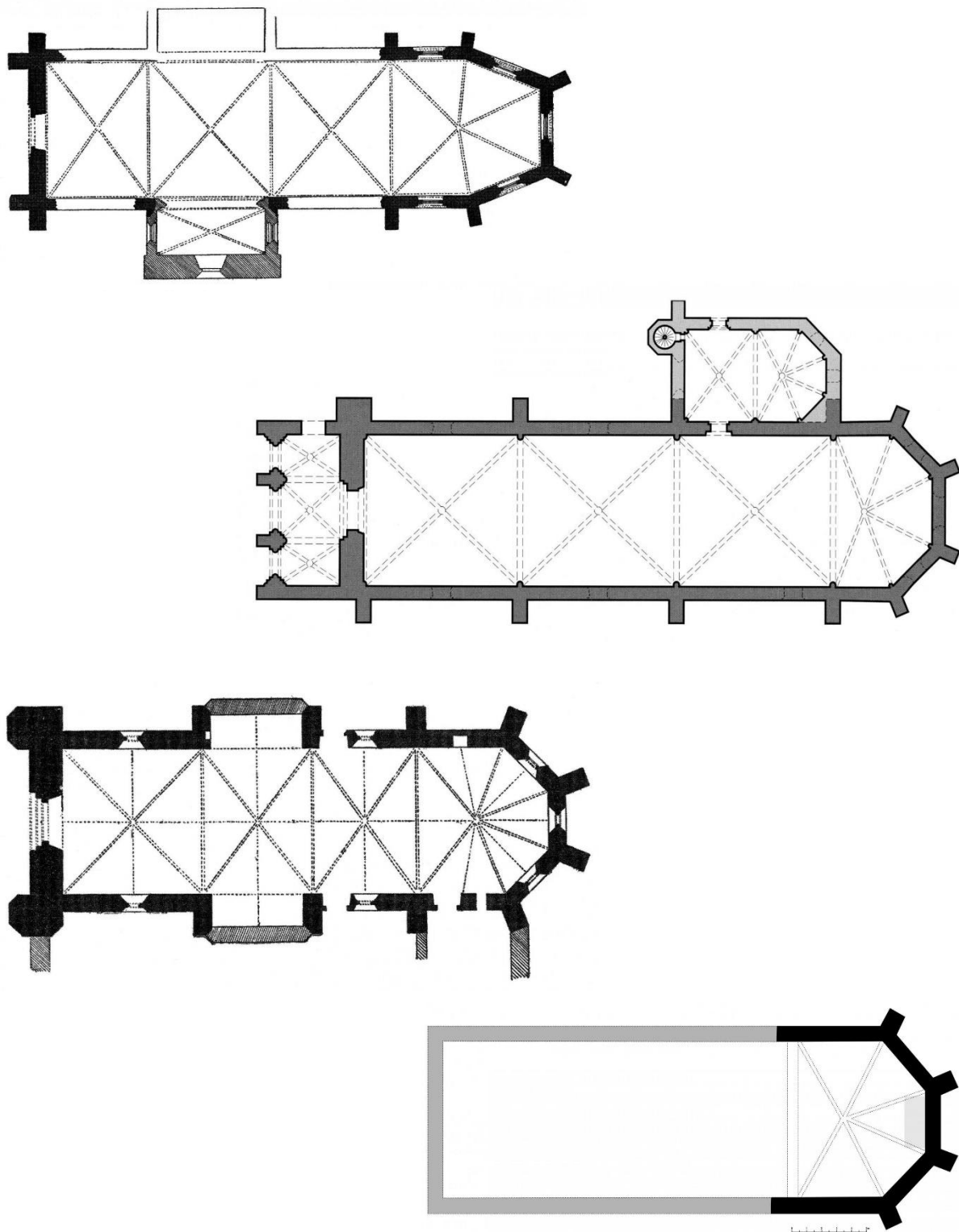


Figure 9 Ground Plans of Franciscan Church, Famagusta; Augustinian Church, Nicosia; Carmelite Church, Famagusta; Dominican Church, Famagusta (reconstruction).

Plans: Jeffery 1922; Plagnieux, Soulard 2006; Enlart 1899; author.

Figure 10
Famagusta,
Franciscan
Church from
East. Photo:
author.



Figure 11
Nicosia,
Augustinian
Church
(Ömeriye
Mosque)
from East.
Photo:
author.



are almost identical to those of our ruin.¹³ With a width of around 9 m, the latter is also very similar in dimensions. All three (partly) preserved churches had ogival vaults with a single central keystone in the choir polygon, so we can assume the same for St. Dominic.



Figure 12 Famagusta, Carmelite Church from East. Photo: author.

¹³ On the Franciscan Church in Famagusta most importantly Enlart 1899, pp. 327–335; Jeffery 1911/12; Plagnieux, Soulard 2006, pp. 238–242; Olympios 2011; Olympios 2018, pp. 162–172. On the Augustinian Church in Nicosia Enlart 1899, pp. 162–167; Plagnieux, Soulard 2006, pp. 176–181; Olympios 2018, pp. 232–239. On the Carmelite Church in Famagusta Enlart 1899, pp. 336–347; Plagnieux, Soulard 2006, pp. 251–257; Olympios 2009; Olympios 2018, pp. 239–246.

The evidence concerning the architectural decoration is scarcer. Enlart was able to distinguish voussoirs of two different profile types, which remain on site today.¹⁴ The first group (M1), a flattened ogee molding with a lateral hollow-roll-quirk sequence, belongs to one of the most common rib profile groups in medieval Cyprus (**Fig. 13**).

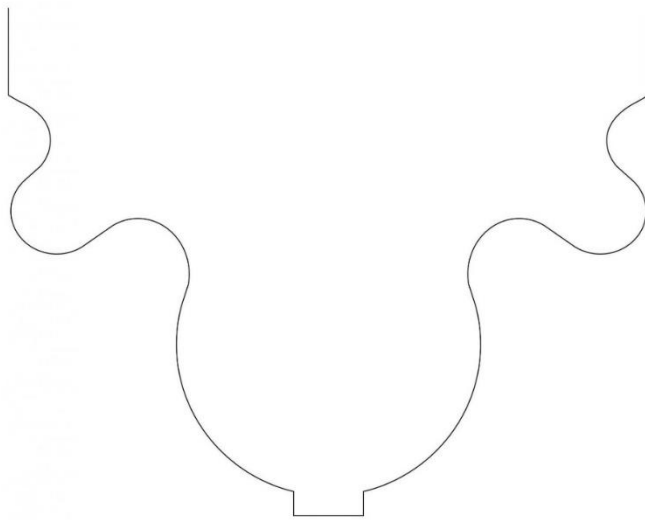


Figure 13
Famagusta,
Dominican
Church,
Molding Profile
M1 (Vault Ribs).
Drawing and
photo: author.

¹⁴ Enlart 1899, p. 378: "[...] On y remarque aussi des claveaux de deux dimensions et de deux profils. Les uns proviennent d'arcs ogives et sont ornés d'un tore aminci à méplat et de deux boudins cantonnés de gorges; les autres, plus larges, ont appartenu sans doute à des arcs doubleaux; leurs angles sont entaillés de cavets que surmontent des baguettes."

We find similar rib profiles, for example, among the debris of the chapter house in Bellapais Abbey or in the lateral chapel of the Franciscan Church in Famagusta, added onto the church in the course of the 14th century (**Fig. 14**).¹⁵ Enlart's



Figure 14 Famagusta, Franciscan Church, Vault of the Southern Chapel. Photo: author.

¹⁵ On Bellapais in detail Olympios 2018, pp. 255–283.

hypothetical attribution of these fragments to the prominent choir vault is certainly tempting, even if the choirs of the other two preserved mendicant churches in the city showed different rib profiles, absent from our site (a simple polygonal profile in the Carmelite Church - **Fig. 15** -, a triple roll in the Franciscan Church).¹⁶

Nevertheless, the best-preserved fragment with this profile possesses a larger block attached to the back of the rib, intended to bound into the masonry.



Figure 15 Famagusta, Carmelite Church, Choir Vault (vault ribs preserved only in the lower zone). Photo: author.

¹⁶ See footnote 12 above.

Figure 16
 Famagusta,
 Franciscan Church,
 Nave Vault (detail).
 Photo: author.



This contradicts the Famagustan custom to attach ribs to the vaults from the underside as decorative feature rather than connecting both structurally (see e.g. the ruin of the Franciscan church, **Fig. 16**). While the arch springers (*tas-de-charge*) usually do bind into the wall behind in some way, the right-angled shape of the



Figure 17 Famagusta, Dominican Church from South, foundations of the choir (during the unprofessional clearing in 2010). Photo: Michael J.K. Walsh, 2010.

preserved block would clash with the angled shape of the choir polygon's corners. At the present stage, it is not possible to assign a precise place to the block with the rib fragment, which might still be part of the vault system of the church. An additional argument for assigning M1 to the church choir might be a large rib fragment of the same profile, also with rather large block attached to the back, which was uncovered in the southern half of the polygon (**Fig. 17**). Neither find context nor dimensions were documented – as for all finds on site – and it appears to have since vanished,



Figure 18 a, b Famagusta, Dominican Church, Molding Profile M2.
Images: author.

thus preventing any investigation by the author. Despite those arguments, the unsolved problem of the precise position for the preserved fragment of M1 requires us to think of an alternative possibility: that it belonged to either a later side chapel in the not-yet uncovered parts of the building or to the monastic buildings.

A single voussoir (M2) with an ogee-shaped profile, cut at an angle, is even less easily attributable, but seems to have belonged to a ribbed vault as well (**Fig. 18**). Its elegant, waved shape is far less common on the island and would appear to indicate a later date. Considering the past of the site, which has been dug over at least twice, we must wonder from which building part this voussoir might have come and even if it could not have been brought here from a different site.¹⁷

¹⁷ Mersch 2014, p. 258 (esp. fn 95), briefly discusses the rib profiles of the site in the context of Cypriot 14th-century architecture. It appears she considers M2 to be the type used for the entire church.



Figure 19 Famagusta, Dominican Church, Molding Profile M3 (Window Jambs).
Drawing and photo: author.

The second profile (M3) described by Enlart, with chamfered angles and lateral roll molding, is of considerably larger size: the stone blocks reach a width of approximately 50 cm (**Fig. 19**). Enlart's assumption that these belonged to transverse arches of the rib vault, must be rejected, even if the profile itself would not be inappropriate for such larger, dividing arches. This is because the best-preserved pieces of this molding clearly show a small notch in the centre of the flat profile front. This is usually the sign for a window frame, the notch facilitating the later placement of (glass) panels. A window framed by single rolls or bowtels is generally thinkable, even if unparalleled among the preserved structures, yet the way the preserved stones are cut merits some attention. To reach the attested wall thickness of 1 m, further profiled stones would have had to be added to both sides of the remaining profiled stones. And indeed, if taking the Franciscan church as comparison, this appears possible: there, every third or fourth stone of the window profiles was conceived in such a way, while the layers above and below made use of joints in the center or directly to one side of the central molding profile (i.e. composing each layer of two blocks instead of three) (**Fig. 20**). Thus, we can also learn from these scarce fragments that, while a different molding profile was chosen, the technique of masonry appears to have been inspired by other examples in the city.



Figure 20 Famagusta, Franciscan Church, Window Jamb. Photo: author.

Virtually nothing remains on site of the window tracery, except for a single piece (**Fig. 21**), which, nevertheless, is of some value. It shows a triangular roll molding with file, slightly curved on two sides, and a bit more rounded on the third side. This might be the center piece of a double lancet standard pattern for the choir windows: two cusped lancets holing an oculus (or, potentially, a curved triangle) on top. The same pattern has been reconstructed for the Franciscan Church as well (**Fig. 22**) and is preserved, among others, at the refectory of Bellapais Abbey (**Fig. 23**).¹⁸



Figure 21 Famagusta, Dominican Church, Fragment of Tracery. Photo: author.

¹⁸ The reconstruction proposed in Jeffery 1911/12, figs. 2–3, without further discussion of details.

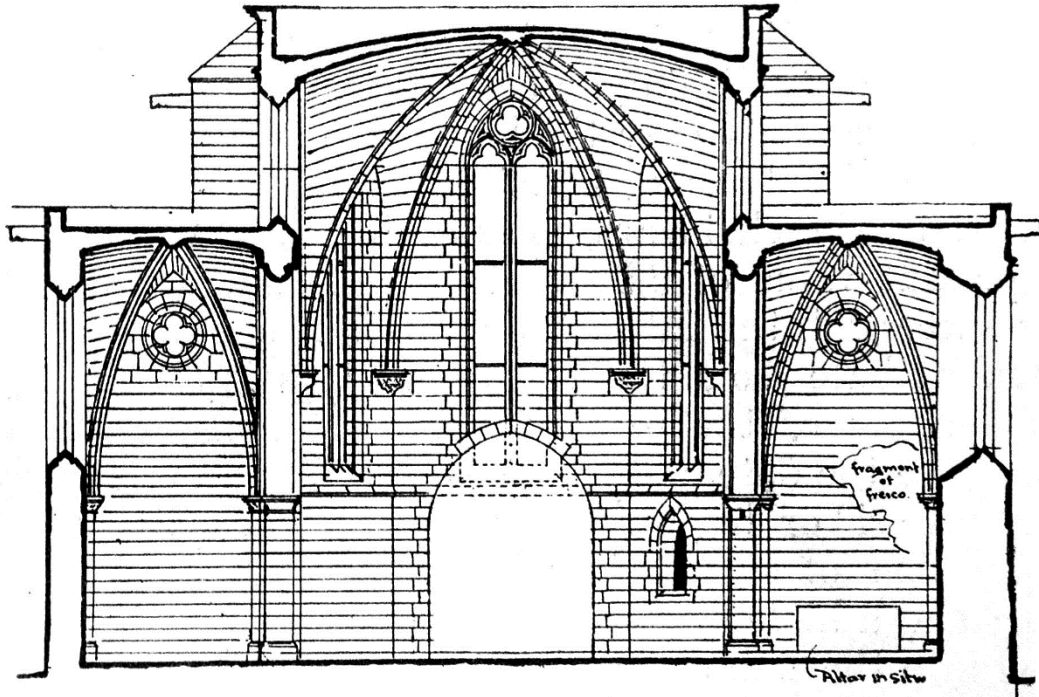


Figure 22 Famagusta, Franciscan Church, Transversal section.
Image: reconstruction by George Jeffery, 1912.



Figure 23 Bellapais Abbey,
Refectory Window. Photo:
author.



Figure 24
Famagusta,
Franciscan
Church, Choir
Vaults. Photo:
author.

As the western half of the church is still underground, the evaluation of this part is more problematic. We can assume that there was a single nave, comparable to the three preserved mendicant churches, all of which feature aisleless plans. All preserved comparanda are vaulted throughout, which is indeed one possible



Figure 25 Nicosia, Augustinian Church (Ömeriye Mosque), Choir with medieval colonettes and Ottoman arches. Photo: author.

suggestion for the original shape of our church (to which we will return with a potential alternative below). The execution of these three churches' vaults and their particular support system differs: while those of the Famagustan buildings rest on corbels (**Fig. 24**), the Augustinian Church in Nicosia possesses engaged shafts of considerable size, which carried the now missing vault ribs (**Fig. 25**).¹⁹ The scarce evidence of St. Dominic is partly contradictory: in the polygonal choir, no traces of engaged shafts remain – a parallel to the other Famagustan examples. Unlike there, however, we find the rectangular foundations protruding from the lateral walls at

¹⁹ For references see footnote 12 above.

the end of the choir bay (**Fig. 26**). These areas are heavily damaged, so that it is not clear if these blocks are separated from the adjoining choir walls by joints, i.e. later additions, or part of the original concept. Could they indicate that a protruding choir arch separated the eastern bay from the nave?



Figure 26 Famagusta, Dominican Church, Northern Wall with Pier Foundation at the End of the Nave. Photo: author.



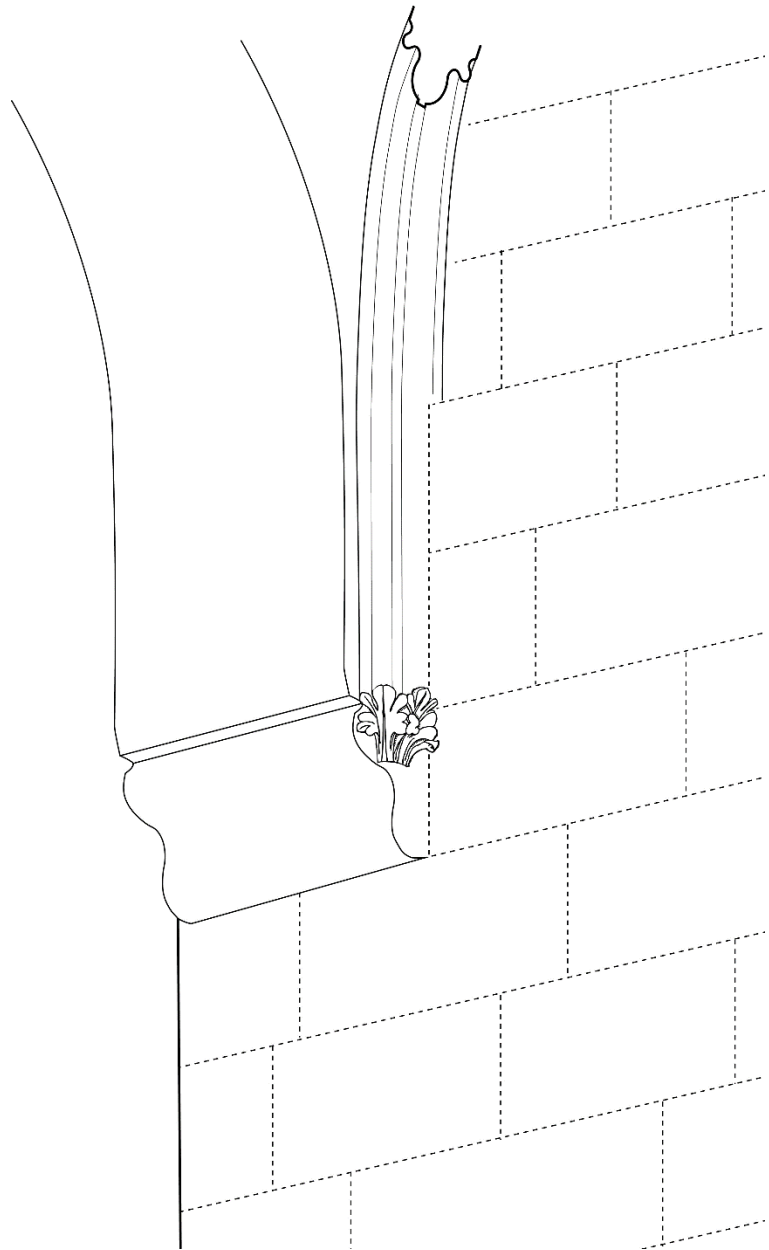
Figures 27, 28, 29 Famagusta,
Dominican Church, Vault Impost (?).
Photos: author.



A curious, large stone lying
among the debris (**Fig. 27, 28, 29**)
might inspire us to envision an even
more unusual solution, which,
despite its hypothetical character,
shall be proposed here as a basis for
further debate. The stone shows an

Figure 30 Famagusta,
Dominican Church, Vault
Impost, Reconstruction
Sketch. Image: author.

attic molding, which on first glance seems to belong to a horizontal frieze, but the side of the stone is decorated with a second molding at a right angle to the better preserved first one, partly covered by later plaster. It seems to correspond to the previously



described rib molding M1, placed – this is crucial – slightly obliquely and missing the right lateral roll. We might thus wonder, if this stone was indeed rather a single, wide corbel for a pronounced transverse choir arch, including the springer for the adjoining choir vault emerging from the wall behind (**Fig. 30**). As tempting as this – admittedly speculative – interpretation might seem, there are several problems. The solution would be unique; wide profiled corbels for transverse arches with adjoining vault springers appear very infrequently in the context of Cistercian architecture



Figure 31 Loccum Monastery (Germany), Church of St. George, Vault Impost (second half of 13th century). Photo: author.

(Fig. 31), yet these examples are far away from Famagusta – geographically, chronologically, and artistically.²⁰ In

general, choir arches which rest on corbels are not unknown in the Dominican architecture, as is demonstrated by, among others, the churches of Colmar (choir consecrated in 1291, **Fig. 32**) or Bamberg (end of 14th century), but again the formal differences are hard to overlook: in both cases, the corbels are of a very reduced format, rather simple half-capitals, and both are not combined with the springers of the adjoining vault.²¹ Furthermore, the large, rather flat format of the stone makes wonder: if placed in the wall upright, it would have had purely decorative, rather than weight-bearing function with a mere 15 cm of depth binding into the wall

²⁰ See for example the Cistercian churches of Heiligenkreuz, Austria (late 12th century) and Loccum, Germany (consecrated 1249). See Thome 2007, pp. 118–119 and Untermann 2001, p. 475, with further references.

²¹ Schenkluhn 2000, p. 205.

Figure 32 Colmar (France), Dominican Church, Vault Impost of the Choir Arch (c. 1300). Photo: author.



behind – a consideration that might admittedly not have been central to the Famagustan builders.

If we continue further developing this hypothesis – despite the listed issues and due to the lack of better solutions of what to make of the preserved stone – this would have a remarkable consequence. As the rib profile appears on one side of the presumed corbel only, this might potentially mean that the nave was unvaulted. The only Cypriot example for a large unvaulted nave of a mendicant church was that of the first Franciscan church in Nicosia, as shown by Michalis Olympios (**Fig. 33**).²² This building, however, ended in a tripartite rectangular choir – a distinctly different mendicant architectural tradition otherwise unknown in Cyprus, even if present in different areas of the Eastern Mediterranean.²³ The geographically nearest example of a single nave, aisleless monastic church with

²² Olympios 2012, evaluating the results of Camille Enlart's excavation of 1901 (Enlart 1909).

²³ For a comparative scheme of plans see Kitsiki Panagopoulos 1979, p. 146.

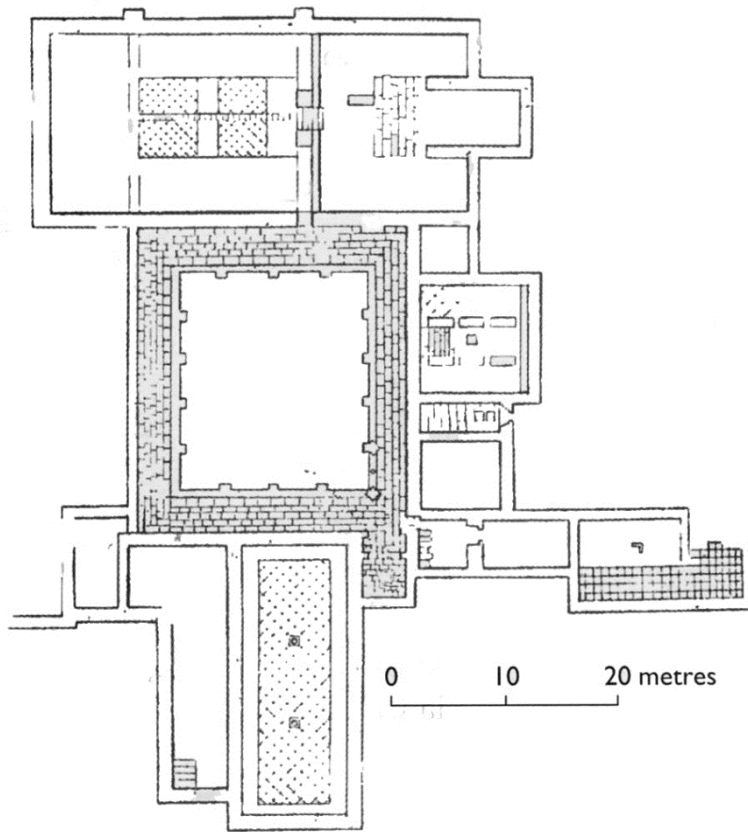


Figure 33 Nicosia, Beaulieu Abbey, Plan of the Excavation in 1901. Image: after Enlart 1909 and Olympios 2012.

polygonal choir and unvaulted nave is presented by the monastic church of Isova in Greece (**Fig. 34**).²⁴ There, although the choir is completely destroyed, it can be reconstructed thanks to foundation fragments: it was slightly less wide than the nave and possessed external buttresses. Unfortunately, we know nothing about how the nave was connected to the choir – was there a prominent arch on corbels as well?

The vault springer itself does not fit into commonly used models either, as the profile appears to rise entirely vertically, without any curvature preparing for the ribs above. Keeping in mind the speculative nature of the proposed solution, we could think of a slightly lower transversal arch, resulting in a moderately stilted vault

²⁴ Traquair 1923/24, pp. 4–7; Bon 1969, pp. 537–544; Kitsiki Panagopoulos 1979, pp. 42–52. The latter attributes the monastery to the Cistercian order, but this remains uncertain. The character of the architecture is rather “un-Cistercian” as already remarked by Otto Feld (Feld 1990, p. 135).

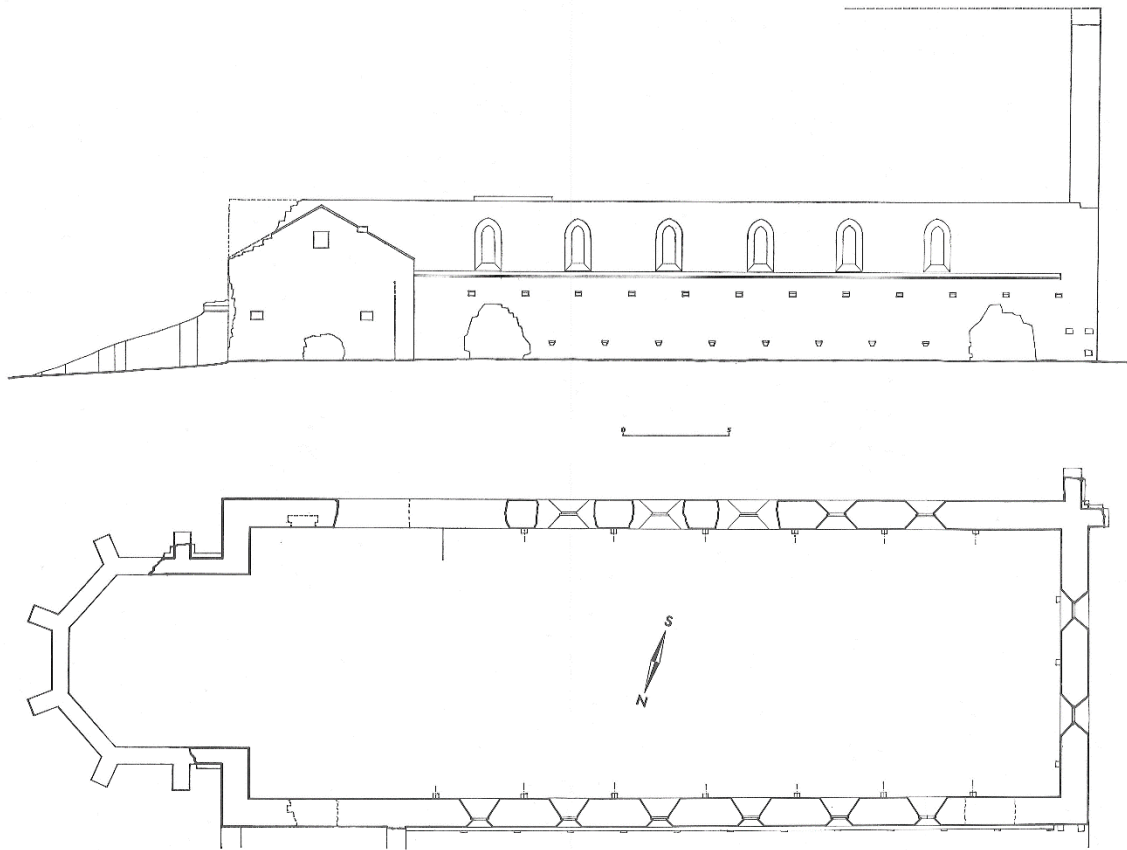


Figure 34 Isova Monastery (Greece), Church of our Lady, Plan and Section.
Image: Kitsiki Panagopoulos 1979.

section or simply of a rather low placement of the corbel below the arch springer level. Again, the solution would be unique for Cyprus, but not unheard of in Western Europe.

As if this evidence was not puzzling enough, we are left with the problem of the maybe-or-not later square foundations protruding into the choir bay at its western end. If indeed a prominent transversal choir arch had rested on corbels, with the choir ribs directly adjoining, these foundations cannot belong to the original structure: the corbel would have been placed on the front of the pier rising above said foundations, while the vault arches would have ended in the angles between

protruding pier and lateral choir wall. Thus, most likely, the piers were added later, perhaps as part of an arch inserted under the vault after one of the earthquakes that shattered other large buildings in the city.²⁵ To conclude, we propose as one possible alternative option for the original shape of the church that an unvaulted aisleless, single nave of unknown size adjoined the vaulted choir. The two areas might have been separated by a slightly lower transversal arch resting on wide corbels placed on the level of the stilted choir vault's springers. It has to be underlined that, in particular, the suggestion of an unvaulted nave is highly speculative at the current stage and further excavations, once possible, will certainly come with new material evidence to be woven into the debate around the reconstruction of the church type.

Of the church's immobile furnishings, of central interest for an evaluation of the liturgical functioning of the space, hardly anything is left. We can easily locate the main altar, the base of which is almost completely preserved (**Fig. 35**). As Etienne de Lusignan informs us, its *mensa* was made from a part of a marble column legendarily connected to the martyrdom of Saint Barnabas – an astonishing account of the use of a spolia piece as veneration-worthy relic-like object of liturgical furnishing.²⁶ Sadly, nothing remains of this slab, neither of the choir screen, the former existence of which is very probable (even if we do not know if it was made from stone or wood).²⁷ We might wonder if it stood further west from the choir bay: the eastern cloister wing

²⁵ Inserted arches with the aim to strengthen the structure are quite common in many Cypriot churches of the medieval period. In Famagusta they are attested for example for the Unidentified Church 18 – also collapsed and ruined in later centuries (Kaffenberger 2019).

²⁶ Lusignan 1580, fol. 45v-46v.

²⁷ A summary on access ways and screens in mendicant churches Mersch 2009, pp. 154–158.



Figure 35 Famagusta, Dominican Church, Altar Foundations (2010).

Photo: Michael J.K. Walsh, 2010

meeting the church west from the presumed transversal arch, so that a direct access from the cloister to the church would have led into the nave. Therefore, it is likely that the liturgical choir extended into the nave, again nothing unheard of for medieval monastic churches.

1.2 The monastic buildings

Of the cloister, large parts of the eastern wing with well-preserved stone pavement as well as the foundations of the adjoining rooms have been uncovered



Figure 36 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Cloister from North (2010).
Photo: Michael J.K. Walsh, 2010

(**Fig. 36**). The best-preserved part is the rectangular, unvaulted room mistaken for the church by Enlart (**Fig. 37, 38**). In the still-standing northern wall (its southern counterpart collapsed at some point after 1939), the springer of a transversal straining arch remains. It rested on unusually wide profiled corbels with flat molding profile. The clumsy insertion of the arch into the wall (it is surrounded by rubble filling the gaps to the adjoining ashlar masonry) suggests that it was a later addition, perhaps to stabilize the wooden roof after static problems occurred at the same time as in the church (**Fig. 39**). A polygonal capital and column fragment, visible on a photograph taken after the excavation in 1938, might be part of a central column



Figures 37, 38 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Chapter House from south-west and north-east (2013). Photos: author.





Figure 39 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Chapter House, Vault Impost. Photo: author.

supporting this inserted arch – or, then, rather “twin arch” (**Fig. 40**). The base of this central column remains among

the debris while the other fragments have since vanished. Two lancet windows, mentioned above, are placed in the eastern wall. Here, the high quality of the ashlar masonry and the lack of exterior decoration becomes the most apparent. In contrast to this simplicity, the portal leading into the cloister was richly moulded, apparently with an unusual double hollow sequence on both faces. To the north of the portal, in 1939 one could still distinguish a horizontal molding protruding from the wall, presumably the lower part of a window opening. Among the heaps of debris of the southern wall, we recognize not only some stones from the church choir, but, below,



Figure 40 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Chapter House (1939).
Photo: Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.

also remains of steps or a low bench along the wall, also visible on the 1938 photograph. Could this have been the base of a wooden bench for the monks, gathering for chapter meetings? There is hardly any doubt that the room must have served as chapter house; identification supported by the room's location east of the cloister, the richly moulded portal and the low window opening with protruding molding, the latter a common feature for – not only mendicant – chapter hall entrances across Europe.²⁸

²⁸ See for an example in the Mediterranean the Franciscan Monastery of Dubrovnik (first half of the 14th century): Cooper 2009, p. 90.



Figure 41 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Space between Church and Chapter Hall (Public Chapel?) (2010). Photo: Michael J.K. Walsh, 2010.

Between the church and the chapter house, an approximately rectangular space with robust stone slab floor remains (**Fig. 41**). To the east, it possessed a wide, chamfered arch inserted between chapter hall and church buttress as an afterthought, at an unknown date between the 14th and 16th centuries. Margit Mersch is certainly right in pointing out the particular interest of this space, the function of which is obscure.²⁹ Originally, it appears to have been just part of the public street space outside the monastic precinct. When the arch was inserted, this happened apparently to visually separate the space from the surroundings, while the large size of the arch would at the same time suggest that it was not entirely closed off. As the lateral walls

²⁹ Here and below: Mersch 2014, p. 259.

towards the church and the chapter house are destroyed down to the foundation level, it remains open if there were access ways here. It appears though as if a tiny doorway could have been leading into the chapter hall in the western corner, the southern wall of which is broken out down to the foundations on a length of approximately 1 m. Remarkably, the continuous western wall of the space shows that no portal led into the cloister, as one might expect in this position.

Often, comparable spaces between church and chapter houses of mendicant monasteries were used as sacristies, and indeed Mersch describes a doorway in the northern choir wall, which would make such a use probable. Unfortunately, the wall in question is too far destroyed to be certain if there was an opening or not. The identification as sacristy is further put in question by the apparent installation of the room as an afterthought. Would a sacristy not have been integral part of the original church plan? Indeed, examples such as the nearby Carmelite church, where the sacristy was only added during the building process, indicate that this was not an obligatory choice. Mersch's explanation of the "external" access to the space (without connection to the cloister) as indicative of a female convent sacristy is certainly interesting – only external clerics -- not the nuns -- would have had access to the sacristy. Yet the accessway, more of a gate instead of a doorway, appears to be too large to provide access to a usually rather secluded, if not secured space, such as a sacristy. The latter might also be sought elsewhere in an admittedly more unusual location, perhaps to the south of the church (then mirroring the layout of the

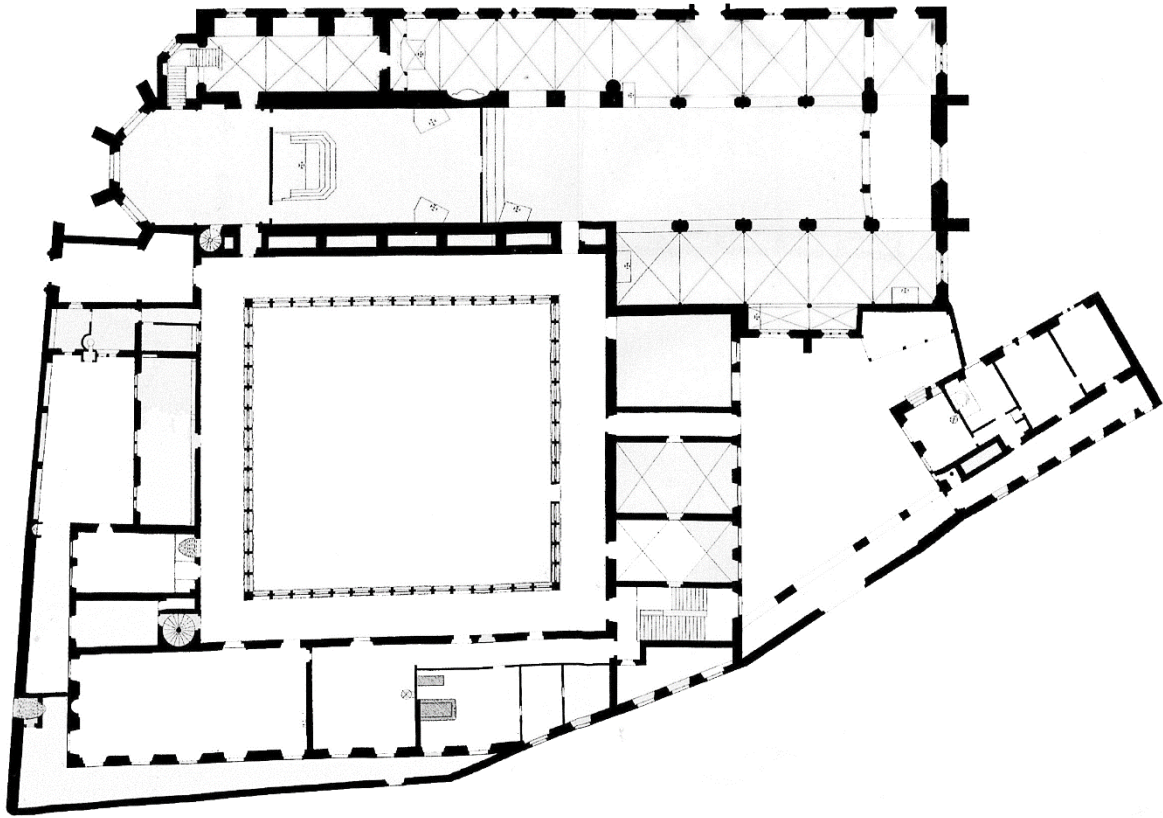


Figure 42 Mainz, Dominican Monastery, Ground Plan (before the demolition 1789).
Image: Friedrich Carl Schneider, 1879.

Carmelite church) or in a vanished space in the upper stories of the monastic buildings.³⁰ Meanwhile, the large gate, creating some sort of semi-open liminal space, rather reminds one of an open porch, either leading from the monastery towards the public street space or to further buildings of the convent such as a cemetery. Such porches are found more often to the west of cloisters, but in densely developed urban environments, specific adaptations to the local sites were made without problems.³¹

³⁰ A partial parallel for the latter option would be provided by Bellapais monastery, where a treasury is located on the roof of the church, while a chapel to the north of the choir seems to have indeed been used as a sacristy.

³¹ On the question of ideal plans vs. adaptation to urban environments in mendicant monasteries see Schenkluhn 2000, pp. 231–237.

The case of the Dominican Monastery in Mainz (Germany), built 1275-1314 and destroyed in the aftermath of the dissolution in 1789, shows such a locally adapted plan (**Fig. 42**).³² One main access way appears to have been a room in exactly the same place as the puzzling space at our site, while the porch in the western cloister aisle led into a second, closed courtyard. The main difference is, however, quite decisive: the porch in Mainz was not connected to church choir or chapter hall, but only possessed a portal into the southern cloister wing. Here, we must enter the sphere of speculation: could there have been a change of use, transforming the chapter house (if we accept the breach in the wall, admittedly not much different from the destroyed church wall on the other side, to be a door) into a space of different function in a later period? This appears unlikely. Alternatively, we might hypothesise that the paved room was rather a semi-public space of urban veneration created adjoining the choir of the church, which itself was not as easily accessible from east. Such small shrines and votive aediculas in the urban streetspace, sometimes a closed off archway, often nothing but a framed mural or a panel painting hung on the wall, easy to reach for passer-bys, have a long tradition in particular in Italy, with examples ranging from the Middle Ages to the modern period (**Fig. 43, 44**). Examples of this practice have to be expected in a city such as Famagusta as well, even if they are hard to detect both in archaeological remains and textual sources. The medieval street layout in this part of Famagusta has never been

³² On this hardly published structure Arens, Neeb, Nothnagel 1940, pp. 86–92; Springer, Berger 1995/96.



Figure 43 Bari (Italy), Vicolo di San Marco, Votive Aedicula with Image of the Virgin (mounted on the back side of the complex of San Nicola). Photo: author.

archaeologically
investigated, so that it
is hard to decide
whether there would
have been a richly
populated street or a
silent corner far off the

beaten tracks in the 14th century.³³ Nevertheless, there appears to have been a large, mostly empty square in 1571, marked as “loco di trar al palio” on Gibellino’s map.

This “palio square” continued to function as a square for javelin games in the Ottoman period, according to Ege Uluca Tümer – it remains open, though, what exact event we have to imagine under “trar al palio.”³⁴ Perhaps a competition between city quarters in the traditional Italian sense? Or a site, where a banner was presented as part of a public ceremony?

³³ On urban patterns and the medieval street grid of Famagusta recently Borowski 2018, esp. pp. 504–506.

³⁴ Uluca Tümer 2015, pp. 118–119, 131.



Figure 44 Rome (Italy), Cappella della Madonna dell'Arco Oscuro (1797). Photo : Croberto68, 2009, commons.wikimedia.org

In any case, a space of social activity such as this (assuming that the tradition goes back to the 14th or 15th centuries) might have

well fostered the creation of small places of devotion in the immediate surroundings.

To return to the ruin of the monastery: the further rooms north of the chapter house are completely destroyed. What remains of the foundations indicates numerous later changes and subdivisions of a once-larger room (**Fig. 45**). At the Premonstratensian Monastery of Bellapais, a similar layout separated the ground floor of the eastern wing into a square chapter house and a larger rectangular hall (**Fig. 46**).³⁵ In our case, the hall might have been of similarly vague function as the one

³⁵ Most recently Olympios 2018, pp. 255–283.



Figure 45
Famagusta,
Dominican
Monastery,
Remains of the
Eastern Wing
(2017). Photo:
author.

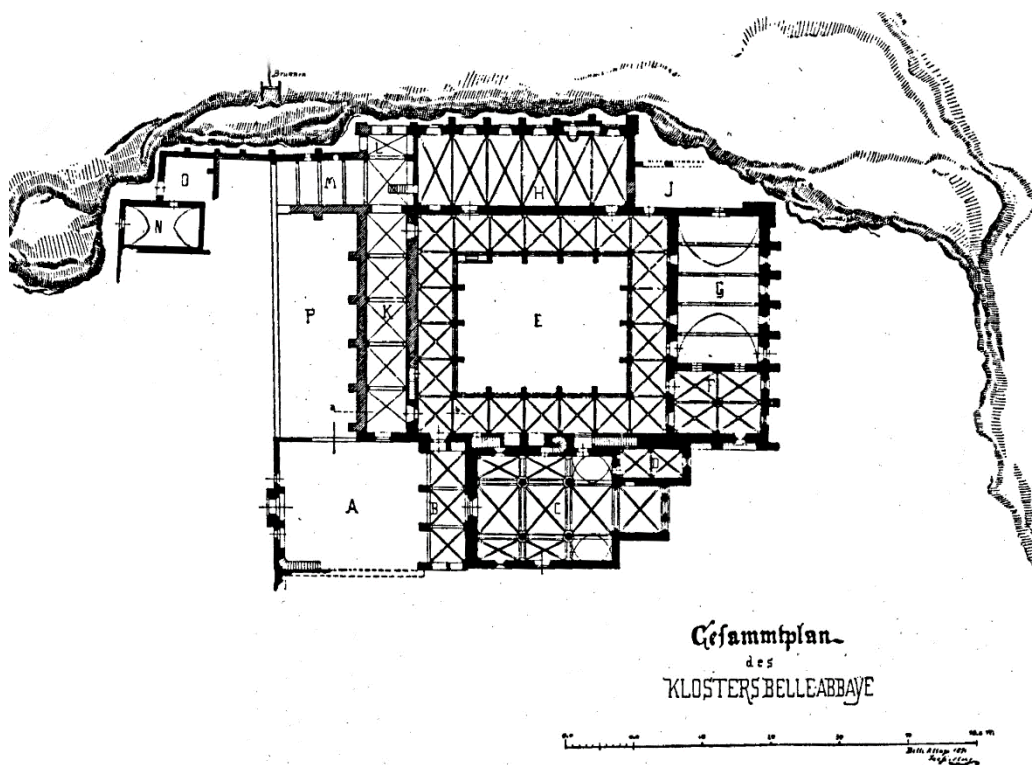


Figure 46
Bellapais
Abbey, Plan (F.
Seeßelberg,
1896). Image:
Collection F.
Seeßelberg

in Bellapais, while another hypothesis could place the refectory here. This room is admittedly usually located across from the church in Cistercian and many other monasteries, but occasionally found right next to the chapter hall in Mendicant

monasteries.³⁶ None of the cloister portals of this room remain; the only original doorway is that to the north. Today it leads into a tiny space, perhaps the result of the many later changes in this part of the building. Towards the cloister, a circular structure might have served as a well for the monks. The latter, situated in a most unusual place in the cloister, might have been used as fresh water supply instead of a fountain house, giving a certain probability to the identification of the hall as refectory at least at some point of the building's history.

In Bellapais, just as in our monastery in Famagusta, the northern end of the eastern wing contains a vaulted cellar. There, however, the cellar forms part of the substructures necessitated by the naturally sloping hill – while the flat terrain in Famagusta makes the (fully underground) cellar a rather odd feature, which, unlike other subterranean structures in the city, does not form part of a natural cave. It is accessed via a flight of steps, cutting through the room with the door into the presumed refectory (**Fig. 47**). In the wall above the cellar entrance, remains of a round arch showing that once there was a window or door on a slightly higher level, cutting today's roof level of the underground building. The cellar itself, covered by a flat barrel vault on one transversal arch is too unspecific in its architectural design to decide, if the reduced, simple appearance is a result of a later erection or its subordinate function (**Fig. 48**). It would appear as if this entire corner of the monastic compound was heavily altered multiple times already before the Ottoman invasion

³⁶ Schenkluhn lists the geographically dispersed examples of Toulouse (France), Bonn (Germany) and Naples (Italy). Schenkluhn 2000, pp. 235–236.



Figures 47, 48 Famagusta, Dominican Monastery, Entrance to the Vaulted Cellar and its Interior (2017). Photos: author.



and the ultimate decay of the structure. Perhaps this remodeling happened at the same time when the vault of the church and the roof of the chapter house were strengthened. It is also possible that the cellar was only installed in its present shape after the monastery was dissolved in the aftermath of 1571 and subsequently fell into ruin.

2. Historic Context, Date and Dedication

After presenting the material evidence, it seems necessary to come back to textual sources referring to the Dominicans in Famagusta, which will also concern the question of the identification of our site as Dominican monastery. A summary of the available material seems appropriate for a first monographic study of a site, even if all sources have been published (most recently in the detailed analysis of Margit Mersch and the very useful list of 14th-century sources compiled by Chris Schabel).³⁷ Already Camille Enlart has commented on the problems of identification: despite being aware of Gibellino's map and even using it for the identification of most other buildings, he was convinced he saw the remains of a church of Saint Clare.³⁸ Based on the wrong reconstruction of a "small chapel" instead of the actual church, he assumed that the Dominicans would have had a more prestigious building. This thought was certainly not wrong, considering bequests of high sums to the monastery during the 14th century. Yet the almost-identical measurements of all three

³⁷ Mersch 2014, Schabel 2020, p. 351.

³⁸ Enlart 1899, p. 377 – he deemed the plan not to be reliable in every aspect.

Famagustan mendicant churches, the ruin discussed here in detail as well as the Carmelite and Franciscan churches, is an argument in favour of an identification of our site as the main Dominican monastery. Enlart also argues that the locally used name of Agia Fotou (certainly given to the cellar when annual Greek liturgies took place there in the modern period) could have been some sort of a translation of the Latin “Saint Clare.” He found a marginal note “Fotini” (φωτεινος: “clear, bright”) in the chronicle of Diomedes Strambaldi, next to the description of events happening in Saint Clare of Nicosia in 1368–1369. From this he concludes that the obscure, local Saint Fotou, who was said to have defeated the plague by transforming it into a rock, might have replaced the Latin Saint Clare in post-medieval vernacular belief. Yet the saint’s legend indicates that it has little to do with either Saint Clare or the better-known Saint Fotini of Karpasia, presumably evoked in the manuscript’s marginalium.³⁹

The most striking argument against an identification as church of Saint Clare, at least for the Venetian period, remains the identification of the building as Saint Dominic in Gibellino’s map.⁴⁰ A church of a Clarisse convent would not have been known by the name of the “rivalling” Saint Dominic. Further evidence comes from the 15th century, when the Genoese Massaria mention “gardens *in contrata de Morfi*

³⁹ Of course, it is not entirely excluded that Saint Fotou was a saint created through a vernacular malapropism at some point in the Ottoman period. Saint Fotini, first mentioned in the chronicle of Leontios Makhairas, was venerated as hermit saint in a cave (today under an 18th-century church) in Agios Andronikos on the Karpas peninsula. Perhaps the placement of the urban sanctuary in a cave-like undercroft played a role in the potentially misunderstood dedication.

⁴⁰ On the reliability of this map see Mersch 2014, p. 242.

apud sanctum Dominichum or near *ecclesiam sancti Dominici*, and a Genoese bath of *sancti Dominici* adjacent to the *platea Morfi*.”⁴¹ Catherine Otten-Froux has shown convincingly that the toponym “Morfi” must be derived from a homonymous tower of the city walls (today Signoria tower), situated to the north-west of the castle – i.e. right across from the ruined monastery site (**Fig. 49**).⁴²

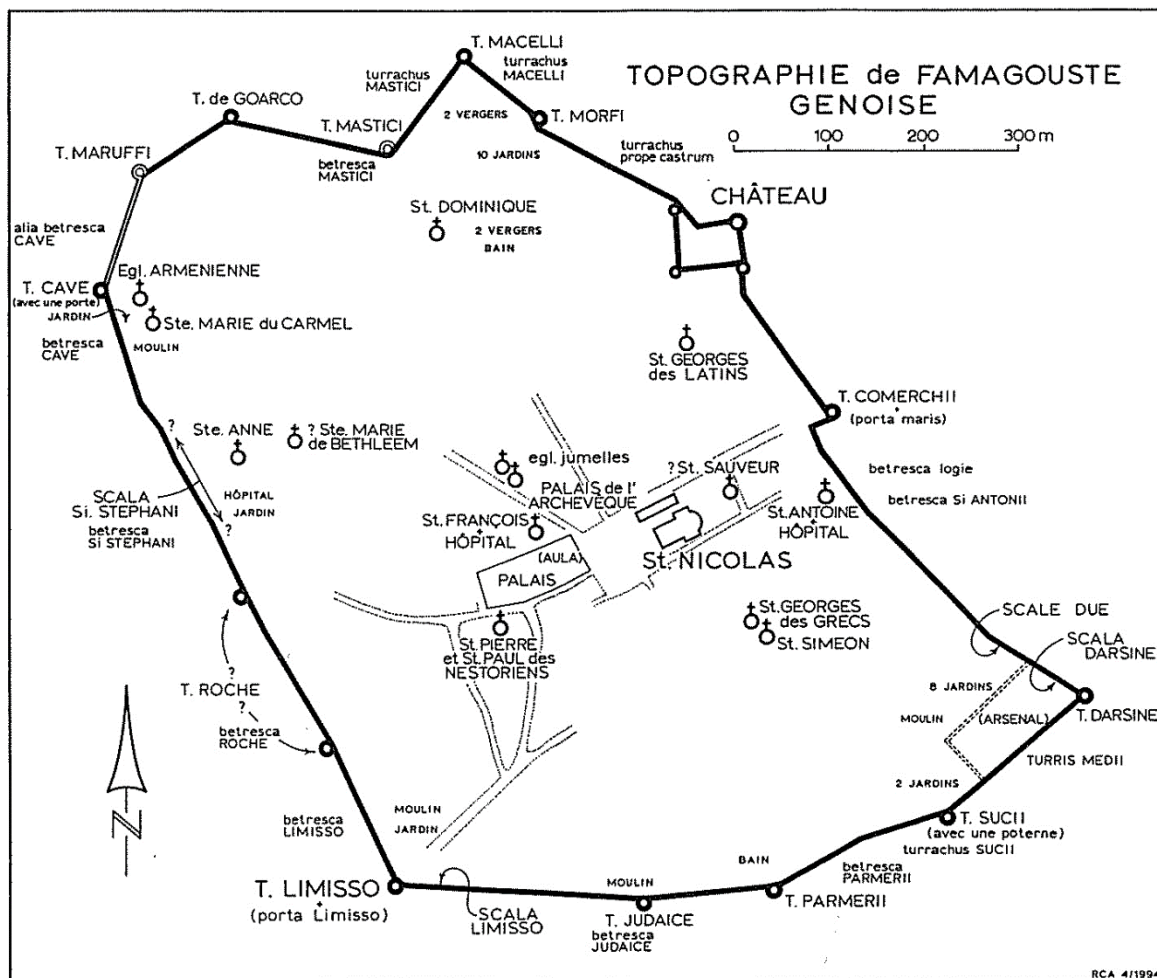


Figure 49 Famagusta, Walls and Significant Monuments in the Genoese Period (after C. Otten-Froux). Image: Otten-Froux 2001.

⁴¹ Mersch 2014, p 259, referring to Otten-Froux 2001, p. 148 and 154, fn. 56–58.

⁴² Otten-Froux 2001, p. 148.

While this establishes that not only in 1571, but also during the 15th century the Monastery belonged to the Dominicans, it does not provide certainty for the 14th century – even if unlikely, a monastery might have changed owners especially during the political turmoil of the late 14th and early 15th century. We will content ourselves here with briefly summing up the evidence presented by Mersch.⁴³ A Clarisse church was under construction in Famagusta in 1333, when it profited from the bequest of a certain Pisan named Giovanni.⁴⁴ The Dominicans had reached Cyprus as early as 1226; four monasteries are attested: in Nicosia, Famagusta, Limassol, and Casale Vaula (modern Vavla?).⁴⁵ The Famagustan one is already mentioned in numerous deeds of around 1300, though always evoked as *ecclesia fratrum predicatorum* without mentioning the dedication of the church to St Dominic.⁴⁶

A papal letter of 1371 indicates that a monastery linked to the Dominicans was about to be built: Gregory XI authorizes the merchant Joseph Zafet, Burgess of Famagusta of presumably Syrian origin, to found and build an Augustinian monastery, albeit under the patronage and institutional control of the Order of Preachers.⁴⁷ In another document we are informed that the cleric Robert de Cosentia from Famagusta was allowed to donate a sum of money to a chapel of Saints Peter and Paul – this has been wrongly linked to the Dominicans as well.⁴⁸ Mersch

⁴³ Here and below Mersch 2014, pp. 259–261.

⁴⁴ For the source see also Otten-Froux 1987, pp. 184–186.

⁴⁵ A general account of the Dominicans in Cyprus in Coureas 1997, pp. 211–215. See also Enlart 1899, p. VIII; Mersch 2014, p. 245.

⁴⁶ Enlart 1899, pp. 262–263; Mersch 2014, p. 260. See Olympios 2014b, pp. 79–80, fn 8 for further references concerning the establishment of the Dominican monastery in Famagusta.

⁴⁷ Bullarium Cyprium III, p. 430; Mersch 2014, p. 260.

⁴⁸ The mistaken interpretation in Coureas 2010, p. 352; Mersch 2014, p. 246.

(following the earlier propositions of among others, Peter Edbury) uses the textual sources to argue that the church of Saints Peter and Paul, a large aisled basilica with rib vaults throughout, located next to the Royal Palace in the center of Famagusta, should have been Dominican.⁴⁹ While indeed some chronicles, among which that of Leontios Makhairas, suggest that the Dominican church was located near the palace at least in the 14th century, the hypothesis has been rejected convincingly.⁵⁰ Already Enlart admits that the puzzling evidence of the chronicles might have been result of the authors confusing the Franciscan church, actually alongside the palace, with the Dominican one. Furthermore, a position of the monastery away from the palace and near the city walls would not have been considered less important or disfavoured: in the capital Nicosia itself, the Dominican church, burial place of the Cypriot kings, appears to have been demolished for the construction of the Venetian fortifications in the 16th century, which in turn indicates a position outside the center.⁵¹ All over Europe, mendicant monasteries were built close to the walls, sometimes even directly adjoining these.⁵² Still, the absence of a city gate near the ruined Famagustan site makes it improbable that this house was also charged with defensive tasks or used as part of the fortification system, as were many of the examples elsewhere. Finally, the identification is indirectly confirmed by the account of 14th-century pilgrim and

⁴⁹ Edbury 1995, pp. 342–344. The dedication of this church is also backed by the Gibellino Engraving, even if its position in the city is shown slightly erroneous there.

⁵⁰ See in detail Enlart 1899, p. 261; Edbury 1995, p. 343; Mersch 2014, pp. 243–245.

⁵¹ Coureas 1997, p. 212.

⁵² Examples would be the important Dominican monastery of Saint-Jacques in Paris or the two mendicant Monasteries of the Dalmatian harbour city Dubrovnik, the latter occupying both extreme ends of the fortified old town. See Schenkluhn 2000, pp. 232–233 on Paris; Cooper 2009 on Dubrovnik.

notary Nicola de Martoni. He gives a brief description of his walk through the city, in which, as recently pointed out by Schabel, he proceeds clockwise, and the Dominican monastery directly follows that of the Carmelites only situated a few hundred meters further west from our ruined site.⁵³

The church of Saints Peter and Paul itself shares hardly any feature with all known mendicant buildings in the Levant (**Fig. 50**). Closely related to the large 13th-century churches of Saint John and Saint Anthony in Acre, it is most likely datable to the mid-14th century.⁵⁴ The church shows some similarity to a ruined church next to the Greek cathedral in Pafos, identified as Franciscan Church by Enlart. However, Michalis Olympios has convincingly argued that this structure should rather be seen as Latin Cathedral; the scarce fragments formerly addressed as Latin Cathedral would, in turn, be the Franciscan Church.⁵⁵ The Famagustan building is thus without mendicant precedent and inscribes itself into a “Levantine” architectural idiom. Theophilos Mogabgab, in the 1930s, proposed that it was a church of the Nestorian community, perhaps their cathedral and mentioned a Syriac inscription only recently rediscovered by Michele Bacci.⁵⁶ “Latin” tombstones found in the church would not be enough to exclude the interpretation as a Nestorian cathedral and it was not

⁵³ Schabel 2020, p. 310.

⁵⁴ On the church, with diverging interpretations of the evidence: Enlart 1899, pp. 301–311 (between 1358 and 1369, Latin); Plagnieux, Soulard 2006, pp. 271–285; Mersch 2014 (Dominican Church); Olympios 2014b, esp. pp. 106–113 (Nestorian Cathedral?, around 1350 or 3rd quarter of the 14th century); Pringle 2015; Borowski 2015, cat. entry “Dominican Church” (Dominican Church, built around 1300); Kaffenberger 2020, chapter 4.3 (Nestorian Cathedral, around 1350).

⁵⁵ Olympios 2011, pp. 117–119. Arguing against this theory Mersch 2014, p. 252, fn 61.

⁵⁶ Mogabgab 1951, p. 188; for the inscription, giving a date of completion of 1351–52 for a not specified part of works, and its implications see Bacci 2014, p 230 and Olympios 2014b, pp. 110–113.

Figure 50
Famagusta,
Saints Peter
and Paul.
Photo:
author.



unthinkable in the multid denominational environment of medieval Famagusta to find members of one congregation donating money to (and later being buried in) a different rite church, nor should we be surprised at finding that there were Nestorians who would prefer their tombstones to be fabricated in Latin manner.⁵⁷ As this brief summary of the evidence concerning Saints Peter and Paul shows, it cannot have been a Dominican church of the same name as evoked by some scholars, making the identification of our site as the original 14th-century Dominican house the only plausible conclusion.

In consequence, the last remaining issue to address is the dating of the buildings on site, purposefully left for discussion after an evaluation of the sources.

⁵⁷ On the question of overlapping identities Kaffenberger 2020, chapter 7. The tombstones, among which one drawn by Camille Enlart and vanished today, bearing the name “Perin” and the date 1310, were used by Borowski 2015 as main evidence to date the church around 1300, a hypothesis to be rejected on grounds of the church’s architectural specifics. On the question of tombstone relocations see Trélat 2020, pp. 339–346.

Even if typologically a dating of the church around 1300 would not be a problem, the rib profile M1 finds the closest counterparts in buildings of the 1340s and 1350s, such as the Bellapais chapter house or the Franciscan Church's side chapel mentioned above. This rather late date is in line with a detail of the tracery fragment: on the front of the tracery, small fillets were applied – just as we can find them on, for example, the Bellapais Refectory window (1340s), even if the first occurrences of fillets date to the early days of the same century. While this speaks for a dating of the sculpted fragments to the mid-14th century, it admittedly brings us back to a methodological problem: those fragments were only hypothetically placed in the fabric of the now destroyed church, so can we really fix a construction date through them? Dating the entire church to the mid-14th century proves to be problematic if held against the textual evidence. Would it mean that we see fragments of a second church on site, as the one mentioned as *ecclesia fratrum predicatorum* existed already in the early 14th century? The considerable size and importance of the structure would also speak against connecting it with the rather vaguely known, projected second “Dominican” monastery. In turn, the replacement or expansion of a (perhaps smaller) late 13th-to early-14th-century church with a new one displaying elements *à la mode* in the mid-14th century would not be entirely impossible, even if this procedure is not mentioned in the sources. By this time, the wealth of the city was on its peak and the 1340s plague epidemics would have resulted in high sums generated for all ecclesiastic institutions, but particularly the mendicant orders, through bequests.

The presently known evidence thus hints towards two possibilities. A) The preserved foundations are those of the church mentioned in the early 14th century. Of this church's vaulting we would then not have any trace and the profiled stones M1 would need to be assigned to a later building phase (side chapels, cloister). B) The sources simply fail to mention a large-scale rebuilding of the church according to a relatively usual plan around the mid-14th century, or a re-vaulting of the (previously unfinished?) church; the profile M1 would then belong to the original church vaults. That church would, in any case, have followed the already extant prototype of the Franciscan (and, if a mid-14th-century building also Carmelite) church, but introduced new molding profiles. The suggested creative new solutions especially concerning the arch between nave and choir and the potentially missing nave vault

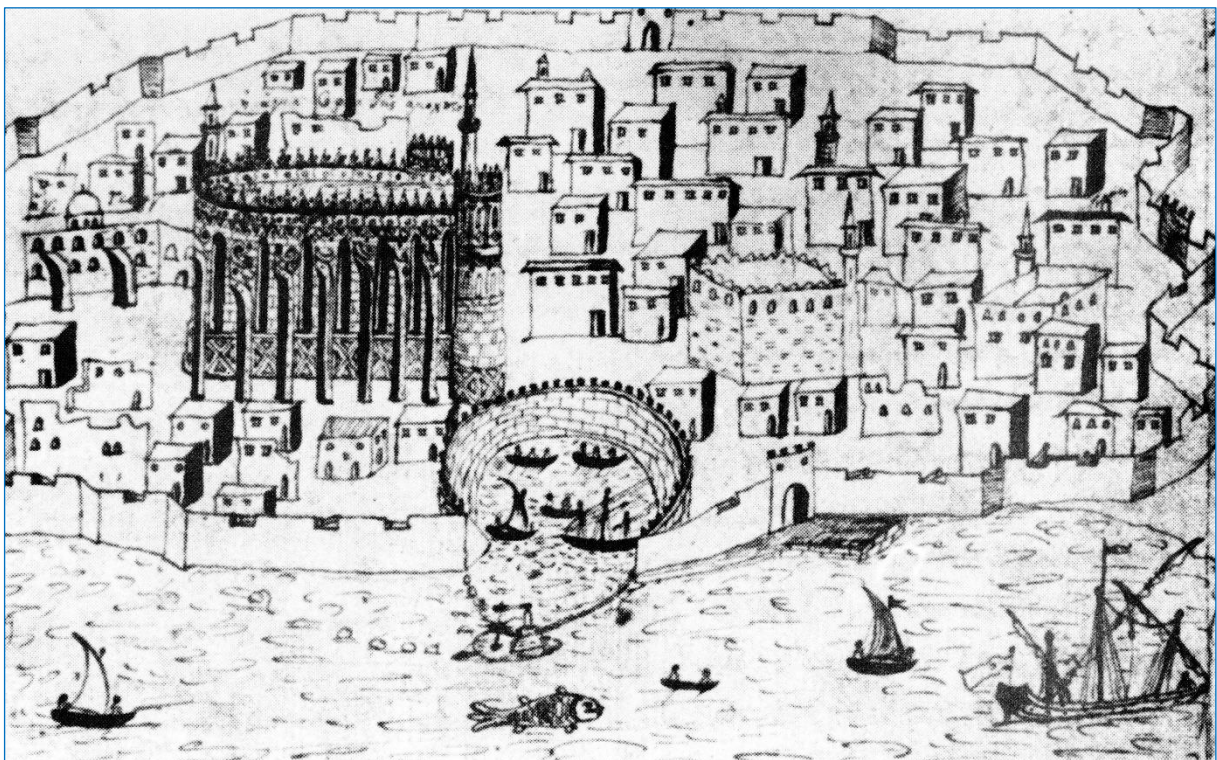


Figure 51 Famagusta, City View with Churches and Palaces as drawn by Vasily Barsky in 1735. Image: Vasily Barsky, 1735.

cannot be proven with certainty until further excavations might produce more material evidence. A later building phase stabilizing the choir arch with thick piers appears to be highly likely, perhaps created after the earthquake that shook Famagusta in 1491.

The same uncertainty applies to the precise layout of the monastic buildings, of which at least the former chapter house and eastern cloister wing (with a large hall, perhaps a refectory?) are clearly identifiable. The extant cellar might have been result of a later remodelling – perhaps in the same phase between 1491 and 1571, when repairs on the church and the chapter house were probably executed. Ultimately, the site appears to have fallen into ruin during the Ottoman conquest of the city, owing to its exposed position close to the seaside walls (**Fig. 51**). It was within those crumbling ruins that the local cult of the obscure Agia Fotou emerged in later centuries, when only a faint memory of a once important religious site remained (**Fig. 52**). 🕯️



Figure 52 The Ruins of Famagusta in 1896 (F. Seeßelberg). Photo: TU Berlin – Planarchiv / Collection F. Seeßelberg.

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