SIDE ALTARS AND “PRO ANIMA” CHAPELS IN THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN: EVIDENCE FROM CYPRUS

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Introduction: Chapels and Altars

Side altars were a distinctive feature of late medieval sacred buildings: even if for the most part they did not survive the alterations of subsequent epochs, such as the new setting of church interiors shaped by the Counter-Reformation and the extensive restoration campaigns of the twentieth century, several extant literary and documentary sources attest to their great numbers and their sometimes odd locations, such as close to piers, columns, and small portions of the church walls.¹

Such altars played a key role in lay piety since they were most often associated with the performance of anniversaries and masses for the sake of one’s soul, although this did not necessarily mean that they were used as individual and exclusive segments of sacred space: on the contrary, they often happened to be shared by several chaplains who lived off the rents granted to them by testamentary bequests for the commemoration of the deceased. Sometimes they were already built when testators gave orders to associate a private chantry to them and, consequently, provided them with congruous ornaments; in many other cases, they were built by individuals when still alive to be endowed later with cloths, chalices, books, crosses, ampullae for wine and water, altarpieces, and many other objects necessary for the liturgy.²

Late medieval documents often describe “altars” as synonymous with “chapels.” The term capella, far from being associated with a specific architectural type or structure, hinted at a functional unit provided with all that was needed or best employed for the performance of a Mass, i.e., vasa sacra, ornaments, paintings, recesses for storing ampullae and utensils, and a set of vestments sufficient for


a priest, a deacon, and two acolytes. Notwithstanding this secondary role, individuals often used them as a means to display their own piety and religious zeal and made efforts to replicate the solemnity of main altars by commissioning for them precious textiles, crosses, and sumptuous panels; the frescoed polyptychs seen within the side chapels of some churches in Siena and its surroundings may be interpreted as low-cost imitations of the auratic power attributed to the place where the eucharistic miracle took place.  

A privileged few managed to obtain the right to build an even more solemn space around the altar associated with the sake of their soul, which they did by breaking through a wall and constructing an autonomous room. In general terms, the best way to pay respect to an altar used in the commemoration of one's soul was to include it within a roofed structure. This could entail either building a vault over it, as often happened within mendicant churches—the flat roofs of the friars' originally scant churches were often transformed into ribbed coverings—or including it within a stone, wooden, or even gessoed aedicule, canopy, or baldachin, often referred to in Italy as tabernacolo, taulito, chapello, or even cielo, a consequence of its being decorated with a star-dotted blue sky, echoing the kind of ornament most often encountered in the decoration of ceilings and canopies. Some were temporary structures designed to emphasize elements of the sacred space on the occasion of special festivities: for example, for the feast of the Annunciation, a statue of the Virgin Mary located on a side altar in Pisa Cathedral was usually covered, according to fourteenth-century inventories, with a real embroidered baldachin supported by staffs.

Even if altars were not expressly meant to be used as private spaces for the commemoration of either an individual or the members of a distinct familial group, the desire for a more direct, even physical involvement in the salvific power attributed to the prayers and liturgical offices endowed by testators encouraged many to request burial close to the chapels they had founded in such a specific way that it is not rare for sarcophagi and tombs to be integrated within the structure of the altar.


chapel itself, as was the case for some tombs of saints and members of the high clergy as well as of eminent laypeople. In a way, the association of altars and tombs was instrumental to the performance of anniversaries, when the ritual characteristics of the exequies were replicated and the incised or carved image of the dead could be used as a substitute for the corpse—more specifically, the tomb was usually covered with the same black pall used in the funeral rites to cover the coffin. It is a well-known fact that since the fourteenth century, the interiors of mendicant and other churches have been dotted with an extraordinarily large number of private burials, most of them slabs on the floor close to altars: from the perspective of laypeople, they were considered integral parts of the chapels, much like tabernacles and altarpieces. Modern pavements have almost completely destroyed the dynamic system of interrelationships between liturgical spaces and burials that was established in the late Middle Ages, and which has been inherited in part by subsequent centuries. Sometimes, however, we are lucky enough to get an idea of them from maps of church interiors sketched by eighteenth-century scholars (who were mainly interested in genealogic studies) before the removal of the slabs.

One such sketch allows us, for example, to reconstruct the web of tomb locations within the Gothic church of San Pier Cigoli, in Lucca, before the making of its pavement in about 1730 (fig. 1). It is easy to understand that most of the tombs were located in the westernmost part of the nave—i.e.,


9 This attitude is best manifested by some extant inscriptions, such as that incised on the now-missing tomb slab of Francesco Alberti (d. 1334), which was once located close to the altar of Saint Albert in the nave of San Francesco in Pistoia: “istam cappellam cum altare tabula et sep(ultu)ra constru(f)ct(a) lapus alberti ad honorem dei et beati alberti in remedio a(n)i(m)e suae et suorum iacet francescus filius eius qui obtit a. D. mcccxxxiii.” Cf. Alessandro Andreini, Cristina Cerrato, and Giuliano Feola, “I cicli costruttivi della chiesa e del convento di S. Francesco dal XIII al XV secolo: analisi storico-architettonica,” in S. Francesco. La chiesa e il convento in Pistoia, ed. by Lucia Gai (Pisa: Pacini, 1993), pp. 47-80, esp. 59-60 and 282, note 84.
within the so-called ecclesia laicorum—being separated from the choir by means of a rood screen.\textsuperscript{10} Since the map describes the structure of the church as it was during the Counter-Reformation, we see that the only side altars were those built on the south and north aisles; but from extant documentary evidence we learn that other altars were present in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One of them was built below the pulpit known as the pergamo of Saint Michael, leaning against the second southern pier; the tomb slab of its founder, a merchant named Bartolomeo Cimacchi (fig. 1, no. 4), was located in front of it, and his son Andrea made a testamentary bequest to complete his father’s work by decorating the altar with a painted panel displaying the archangel and by including it within a decorous and honorable chapel.\textsuperscript{11}

The covering of an altar was enough to transform it into an autonomous liturgical space, symbolically epitomizing the aura of sacredness associated with the presbytery. Many were rather diminutive because of lack of space, such as the “chapel and altar made of brick and a gessoed reed grating” made in a “contracted” way in 1358 on the initiative of a lay testator for the church of San Domenico in Siena,\textsuperscript{12} or the one leaning against a corner of the pilaster located close to the rood screen, which was granted to a Pisan testatrix in the church of Santa Caterina, Pisa, in 1348.\textsuperscript{13} Although such structures have almost completely disappeared, one can easily get an idea of them by looking at more monumental examples, such as the Dragomanni Chapel in San Domenico, Arezzo, which still includes an altar, a stone cielo, and a small recess that was meant as a small aumbry for storing ampullae: not infrequently, such a function was illustrated by a frescoed decoration displaying the objects that were supposed to be kept therein.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{10}] Michele Bacci, “Le antiche lapidi della chiesa del Carmine, ” \textit{L'aldilà} 3 (1997), no. 1, pp. 19-53.
\item [\textsuperscript{13}] Archivio Arcivescovile, Pisa, Cancelleria 1.1, \textit{Atti esecutoriali} 1350-1417, fols. 2661-267v; Bacci, \textit{Investimenti}, p. 137.
\end{itemize}
In the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, another kind of *capella* started to be integrated within the nave walls: the niche-chapel. The popularity of such structures is evidenced by the fact that, within many churches, they happened to be included within specially built sequences of wall recesses meant to house side altars and the tomb slabs of their donors. In many respects, their shape echoed that of the *arcosolia* traditionally used in the cemeteries and funerary spaces within the church precincts, and one can suppose that they deliberately imitated such models as a consequence of their use as commemorative places directly connected with individual or family burials. Extant examples show that they could be embellished by marble revetments and frescoed decorations, as is the case with the elegant late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century niche-chapels preserved in the church of Santa Maria Nuova in Viterbo, where soteriological themes and portraits of supplicants give expression to the individuals’ quest for salvation (fig. 2). From several sources, including Sassetta’s 1423 painting representing the Miracle of the Sacrament, in Durham, we learn that they could also house composite polyptychs and lunette-shaped panels, not unlike those occasionally used for tombs, which were recently discussed by Victor Schmidt. To the best of my knowledge, the only case of a chapel still including a painted image of this kind is the diminutive church of the Porziuncola at Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi, which was decorated in 1393 with the enormous arched *pala* signed by Ilario da Viterbo and commissioned by Brother Francesco da San Gemini, who made use of alms given by laypeople (and, especially, of a merchant and a knight represented as supplicants in the lower edge of the panel; see fig. 21). Not infrequently, the iconographic program was directly inspired by testators’ desire for salvation and included the saints typically invoked by them and portraits of the donors as supplicants as well as other hallmarks hinting at their corporate or individual identity (such as coats-of-arms and inscriptions revealing the association of the space with the commemoration of the dead). Noteworthy is the case of a doctor from Volterra, who gave orders, in his testament of 1374, to be buried either in the cathedral or in the churches of the Friars Minor or the Augustinians, provided that his tomb was

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located close to an altar-chapel decorated with a triptych displaying the Virgin and Child, Saint Francis, and Saint Nicholas of Tolentino. Most frequently, donors were represented close to the holy personages and shown wearing recognizable dress hinting at their social or professional status—or replicating that used for burial and eventually displayed on the tomb slab—and often interacting with their patron saints.

Cyprus

In the fourteenth century, such structures, being instrumental to the expression of individual piety and to the desires of laypeople to appropriate the holy, were introduced in the easternmost Frankish-ruled country in the Levant, the Lusignan Kingdom of Cyprus. The island still preserves many architectural and artistic documents that deserve special attention, since they have preserved many elements that have disappeared elsewhere and, what is most worthy of further research, they seem to have served as models for similar chapels employed in the decoration of buildings not intended for the Latin rite. The present paper is a preliminary description of such uninvestigated material, which will be the subject of more detailed research in the future.

As in western Europe and the Holy Land, Cyriot parish churches were provided with annexed cemeteries that housed burials of their parishioners; nonetheless, individuals had soon started asking for burial within the interiors of mendicant churches. As early as 1254, the archbishop of Nicosia, Hugh of Fagiano, accused the friars of inducing the dying to ask for inhumation within their churches and to make bequests for the making of tombs and architectural works in order to defraud the secular clergy of their major incomes. The kings themselves had chosen the church of Saint Dominic's, located next to the royal palace, as their dynastic pantheon, and we know that this building, destroyed by the Venetians to make space for Giulio Savorgnan's new city walls in 1567, actually contained many altar-chapels. One of them was described by the historian Stefano Lusignano in these terms:

"L' an de grace mil cinq cens soixante et sept, quand on mit par terre l’Eglise sainct Dominique de Nicossie, on trouva soubs l’autel de saincte Eulalie plusieurs reliques de saincts: entre autres sept chefs, ausquels on voyoit encore le playes. Il y avoit pareillement des os, et une robbe de femme, qui..."


21 As reported by Pope Innocent IV's brief to the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, dated May 10, 1254, edited in The Cartulary of the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom of Nicosia, ed. by Nicholas Coureas and Christopher Schabel (Nicosia: Kentro epistimonikon erevnon, 1997), pp. 128-30, doc. no. 38; cf. also the introductory remarks, ibid., pp. 26-27.
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...to the enthroned Virgin. The same dedication is found in the altar inscriptions of Saint John the Baptist in booths around Amman and of Saint George in other places. In the fifteenth century, the church of Saint George of the Latins in Famagusta (fig. 3). Such phenomena are not surprising given that there is ground for thinking that the decoration of the tables of altars with painted panels as ornaments for altar tables is documented by ancient sources. One such panel was commissioned by Archbishop Giovanni Conti (d. 1332) for the side chapel dedicated to Saint Thomas Aquinas in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Nicosia, and since it is known that it included scenes from his life, one can easily infer that it was a kind of "vita retable," probably not unlike that of Saint Nicholas offered by a Latin knight of the Ravendel family for the Greek-rite church of Saint Nicholas of the Roof in Kakopetria. Another kind of altar decoration was represented by statues, since at least one was clearly set within a Gothic niche located on the east wall of the early fourteenth-century church of Saint George of the Latins in Famagusta (fig. 3). Such phenomena are not surprising given that there is ground for thinking that the decoration of the tables of altars with...
images already existed in the Latin-ruled Holy Land: Jaroslav Folda has recently pointed out a passage in the late thirteenth-century chronicle of the Templars of Tyre (usually known as the Gestes des Chyprois) that mentions "une table enpainte de sains par devant" (a panel painting with pictures of saints on the front of it), which can be interpreted as hinting at a kind of dossal.26 Moreover, the representation of the author’s portrait in the illuminated cycle of William of Tyre’s chronicle in the Vatican Library, supposedly made in Antioch in the 1260s and repainted in the late fourteenth century, shows him sitting in meditation in front of an altar with a painted panel of the Virgin and Child on its rear end.27 The use of cult statues is also attested, especially from Islamic sources.28

Such Western types of sacred images were imported by Latins into lands where the Byzantine model of the bidimensional icon was extremely well rooted. Actually, altarpieces were morphologically connected to Byzantine models, and their shape could coincide with that of Greek painted panels; their function was clearly different, however, since no icon was meant to be located on the altar, although on some special occasions it could be kept behind it. On Cyprus and in the Holy Land, the furnishings of the Lord’s table also included the standard liturgical tools—i.e., altar and corporal cloths, silver chalices and the towels used to clean them, glass ampullae for the wine and water, priests’ vestments, and wooden pyxes, which were supposed to be kept closed so that they were not gnawed by woodworms. As a consequence of the need to store such objects in a safe place, all main altars necessarily included piscinae and eucharistic tabernacles (armaria seu sacraria), open in the nearby wall, as stated by a synod held in Limassol in 1298.29 Although the latter have not survived, in a subterranean church

27 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome, Ms. Pal. lat. 1963, fol. 1r. Jaroslav Folda, “A Crusader Manuscript from Antioch,” Atti della Pontificia Accademia romana di archeologia. Rendiconti, ser. III, 42 (1969-70), pp. 283-98; Folda, Crusader Art, p. 348. For a color illustration, see Arti e storia nel Medioevo. III. Del vedere: pubblici, forme e funzioni, ed. by Enrico Castelnuovo and Giuseppe Sergi (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), col. pl. 10. Folda’s dating of the repainted image to the late fourteenth century seems to me too late, since I do not believe that its stylistic features may be interpreted as hallmarks of the Gothic International period. I do not see any impediment to considering it the work of a late thirteenth-century painter, though different from the author of the rest of the cycle.
outside the northern walls of Famagusta (actually a Hellenistic tomb turned into a Christian cult place in the Lusignan period),\textsuperscript{30} the elongated shape still visible to the left of the shallow apsidal niche (fig. 4) was probably meant to house a cupboard with a towerlike crown, not unlike those known mainly from German and northern European fourteenth-century examples.\textsuperscript{31}

When the Ottomans conquered Cyprus in 1570–71, some of the Latin churches were destroyed or given to the Greeks, whereas others—the most illustrious and sumptuous—were converted into mosques.\textsuperscript{32} Even if this proved less destructive than refurbishings inspired by the new criteria of church furnishing promoted by the Counter-Reformation, altars usually did not survive and were more or less systematically destroyed, as witnessed by contemporary sources.\textsuperscript{33} This prevents us from immediately understanding the original function of the wall niches so often encountered within the ruined


\textsuperscript{31} For possible comparanda, see Kroesen and Steensma, \textit{The Interior of the Medieval Village Church}, pp. 105-38.


\textsuperscript{33} As witnessed by Friar Angelo Calepio, \textit{Vera et fidelissima narratione del successo, et defensione del Regno de Cipro}, edited as an appendix to Stefano Lusignano, \textit{Chorogafia et breve historia universale dell’isola de Cipro} (Bologna: Alessandro Benaccio, 1573) [anastatic edition with a foreword by Gilles Grivaud (Nicosia: Cultural Foundation of the Bank of Cyprus, 2004], pp. 211-51, esp. 239.
churches of Famagusta. Starting with Camille Enlart, almost all scholars have automatically interpreted them as funerary enfeux without considering the possibility that they were meant to house side altars: i.e., that they served as chapels for the performance of votive masses. Such an assumption proves only natural if we take into account that both structures were imbued with soteriological meanings and were often associated and combined with each other.

We are now fortunate enough, however, to recognize that in the church presently known after its Turkish name, Sinan Paşa Camii, the conquerors removed just the high altar and simply concealed those located in the northern and southern aisles as well as those on the inner facade; they were rediscovered by the local representative of the Department of Antiquities, Theophilus Mogabgab, in the 1930s. The alleged presence of Syrian inscriptions as well as a few indications provided by medieval sources encouraged some scholars to reject Enlart’s identification of the building as “Saints Peter and Paul” and to hypothesize its connection to Arab Christians, possibly the powerful Nestorians often mentioned in old chronicles, but its inner arrangement, with its many side altars, as well as its location close to the royal palace, make it more plausible that it was a Latin church passed on to the Syrians in a later period.

The two structures leaning against the wall of the counterfacade (fig. 5) may have originally been parts of side altars covered with now-disappeared cieli, whereas one niche-chapel is clearly discernible in the southern aisle and another three can be seen in the northern one (fig. 6). Each includes its original, rectangular

34 See Enlart, Gothic Art, pp. 366-68; Brunehilde Imhaus, “La mort dans la société franque de Chypre,” Επετηρίδα κέντρου επιστημονικών ερευνών 24 (1998), pp. 1-75, esp. 31-32. The only notable exception to this cliché is that of Philippe Plagnieux and Thierry Soulard in L’art gothique en Chypre, p. 281, who remark that wall niches could sometimes be too slender to house funerary monuments, whereas they could include altars.

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Altar, but only one—the westernmost in the northern aisle—is provided with a hole originally meant to house relics. This structure is distinct from the other three because it is covered by a basket arch encompassing a platband, instead of a pointed arch (fig. 7). Two of the chapels preserve, at the center of the intrados, the hook originally used either to support a lamp (fig. 8) or to fasten a wooden canopy or a large painted panel to the wall. Extant documents attest that such structures could be rather complex. We can get an idea of them from the 1382 will of a merchant from Lucca who, oddly enough, made bequests almost exclusively for restorations to be done in the funerary chapel he possessed in the cemetery church of Santa Caterina, close to the basilica of San Frediano. It included a statue of the titular saint, Nicholas, which was fastened to the wall by means of an iron hook and was usually covered with a blue veil in order to protect it from winds; such a veil was fastened to the wooden cielo, whose intrados was decorated with a blue sky dotted with golden stars. It also included figures of saints, both sculpted and painted, as well as protruding elements and colonnettes. Another interesting case is that of the “tabernacle” of the altar of Saint Daniel in the nave of Siena Cathedral (mentioned in 1379-80), which consisted of a painted cupboard provided with doors and including an image of the titular saint.36

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If we return to the Sinan Paşa mosque, we see that the other two niche-chapels on the northern aisle have a pointed-arched structure, including small altars. Large recesses at either side were intended for setting a stone structure inside; an element is still preserved in one of them, consisting of a white rectangular stone whose exterior corner is hollow, in the same manner as the ashlars below. The same device occurs in the other niche-chapels and was probably meant to house colonnettes, as was the case in a later structure included in a funerary space annexed to the southern arm of the transept of Saint Nicholas Cathedral (fig. 9). The niche-chapel on the southern aisle lacks this device, but it includes a feature that is shared by two of the structures on the northern side: the lower portion of wall happens to be hollow, probably in order to insert a stone basement in the floor of the chapel.

Niche-chapels were standard features within the Latin-rite churches of Famagusta. An unidentified fourteenth-century ruined building to the south of the Sinan Paşa mosque preserves two such structures: one is located on the southern wall of the westernmost part of the nave and includes remnants of an altar and an elevated basement (fig. 10); the other is included within the choir precinct, next to the fragmentary pier that possibly supported a rood screen (fig. 11). Both display a pointed-arched shape and the impost is decorated with thin brackets, which did not contribute to the static structure of the niche itself and were consequently meant either as bare ornaments or as supports for some now-vanished element. We will see that such a device occurs frequently in the town buildings of the same century.

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10. Niche-chapel on southern wall of unidentified church to the south of Sinan Paşa Camii, Famagusta (photo: author)

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If we turn to the Carmelite church, a ruined building usually reputed to date from the 1360s, we can distinctly recognize that different purposes were associated with different types of chapels. At about its midpoint the northern wall opens up to a large annexed room that can possibly be identified as the ritual space where the body of the Blessed Peter Thomae (d. 1367) was venerated (according to his last will, he wanted himself to be buried “in introitu chori”); some scant remnants of murals indicate that this more “solemn” chapel, functioning as a real cult-place, was decorated with narrative scenes, whereas the decoration of the interior consisted for the most part of votive or, better, pro anima frescoes that lacked any iconographic or stylistic uniformity and were strictly associated with individual donors’ desire for salvation. Not surprisingly, many such murals were confined to the westernmost part of the nave, where three niche-chapels were also built. All of them have a pointed-arch shape and an intrados that preserves traces of painting; the one on the southern wall is located just below a frescoed “vita retable” of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, which is still readable despite the whitewashes that partially conceal it (fig. 12). It is evident that here, as in Italy, such compositions specifically replicated a typology of painted panels (represented in Cyprus by such enormous icons as that of Saint Nicholas and the Virgin of the Carmelites in the Byzantine Museum, Nicosia) whose purpose was to add emphasis to holy figures deserving special worship. That was the case with Saint Catherine, reputed to have been the daughter of the governor of the nearby Roman town of Constantia, and whose “prison,” identified with a


tomb dating from the seventh century B.C., was a pilgrimage goal for both Cypriot and foreign visitors. Moreover, this structure displays two familiar devices that had not yet been combined together in the previously discussed cases: two thin molded brackets, and, above them, two parallel hollows that are not unlike those in the Sinan Paşa mosque and are absent in the twin chapels on the northern wall, which are provided with either two brackets or two stronger stone corbels.

A similar combination of extended chapels for cultic purposes and niche-chapels associated with funerary and commemorative functions is found within the church of the Friars Minor, where a groin-vaulted space—which preserves its original altar, an elevated basement, and a recess for storing vasa sacra—opens into the southern wall. One wonders if this may be identified as the chapel of Saint Catherine, often described by late medieval pilgrims as the original location of the school where the holy martyr had received her education (fig. 13). In the westernmost part of the nave are several sumptuous niche-chapels, whose pointed arches are decorated with moldings in their extrados. The one located on the southern wall, close to the larger chapel (fig. 14), displays many interesting details: it still preserves part of its basement, a small pointed-arched recess for vasa sacra, and the same combination of brackets and hollows found in the Carmelite church. It is interesting that the excavated intrados corresponds with a line of smaller stones in the niche wall, which may reinforce the hypothesis that an altar table was originally inserted in that position. In a nearby building, now used as a sculptor’s studio, we see structures decorated with similarly elabo-


45 As witnessed, for example, by an early fifteenth-century anonymous Spanish Viaje de Terra Santa, ed. by J.R. Jones, Viajeros españoles a Tierra Santa (siglos XVI y XVII) (Madrid: Miraguano, 1998), pp. 109-243, esp. 142.
rate moldings; unfortunately, these niches were walled up in a later period. There is evidence to support the idea that the making of elegantly carved side chapels was taken further in the centuries that followed, the most striking example being the sixteenth-century Renaissance-style Halbciboria in the church of Saint Mamas in the village of Agios Sozomenos (fig. 15).

It is evident that an archaeological survey would prove extremely useful, since in all of the Famagustan churches, which for the most part were left deserted and ruined after the Ottoman conquest of the town, there may be unearthed remnants of the original structures; unfortunately, at present this is impossible because of the political situation in northern Cyprus, particularly since some buildings were included within a military camp up to some years ago (among them the Carmelite church). The last archeological surveys date from the 1940s and were organized by the local representative of the Department of Antiquities, the above-mentioned Theophilus Mogabgab. The most thorough intervention he made involved the church known, after Enlart’s work, as that of the Templars; the interior pavement was completely excavated in 1947, and many burials were unearthed. This shows that the interiors of Latin churches were extensively employed for the inhumation of laypeople and that most of them, as in Lucca, made use of underground tombs instead of wall monuments.

On Cyprus, as elsewhere, the practice of indoor burial was regarded as a privilege, enabling individuals to be more deeply involved in the auratic power of both the church space and the holy liturgy. Most such tombs, however, consist of simple incised or carved slabs, and their interaction with chantry altars and chapels was limited to mere proximity. More sumptuous types of sepulchres were less common: some extant sculpted sarcophagi, preserved in Nicosia and Limassol, are supposed to have been made to be either stood on a pediment or suspended on corbels; it is also commonplace to associate them with a location within *enfeux*, such as the above-mentioned structure in the Cathedral.

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of Saint Nicholas (fig. 9). This one was located in a vaulted room added on the southeast of the main church, which was probably built as a funerary annex and had its own altar. This is hardly surprising given that other examples from Latin-ruled areas reveal that eminent personages were eventually granted the right of burial within the *ius patronatus* of such privileged spaces as the chapels located to the north and south of the choir.\(^49\) On the contrary, canopied tombs were rare, a notable exception being the so-called proskynetarion in the church of Agios Georgios tou Kastrou at Geraki, in the Peloponnese, dating from the second half of the fourteenth century.\(^50\)

A most revealing example of a “contracted chapel” can be recognized in the funerary *enfeu* of Abbess Échive de Dampierre (d. 1340), which lies in bad condition in the northern porch of the now-deserted Armenian church of Nicosia (figs. 16-17). (The church, known in Frankish times as the abbey church of Our Lady of Tortosa, was inhabited by nuns referred to as the “Carpitane” of Antioch.\(^51\))


This monument consists of an arcaded niche that is surmounted by a pediment and richly ornamented: it includes the original altar, whose table is inserted within the two jambs, and is flanked by two small recesses for storing the *vasa sacra*. Most interestingly, the abbess’s sepulchre lies horizontally against the altar basement and is integrated within the chapel itself, as if it were meant to be used as a threshold. If this solution is original, there is reason to believe that it may reflect the abbess’s desire for a more direct involvement in the aura of sacredness attributed to that small liturgical space, in accordance with the feelings and practices of late medieval testators. This structure sounded odd to Enlart, who took for granted that it had been modified; however, if this tomb had been put there in a later period, it would probably not have covered a dug grave, such as the one recently revealed by vandalism, which caused the incised marble cover to separate from the body of the sepulchre.\footnote{52}

**Conclusion**

We can attempt to summarize this survey of Famagustan niche-chapels by saying that their shape was at least partly a consequence of their function: side altars needed to be embellished with proper coverings, and an arched recess in the wall could play the same role as a canoped *cielo*. At the same time, the direct involvement of such structures in the performance of votive masses and anniversaries and their association with individual tombs were more efficaciously emphasized by echoing an *arcosolium* shape. This would explain why niche-chapels were soon appropriated even by the other Christian communities living in the multicultural milieu of Famagusta. Eastern Christians, fascinated by the Western approach to the afterlife, not only came to make use of Latin-style tomb-slabs,\footnote{53} they also started to promote the building of *pro anima* chapels, such as that endowed by a mid-fifteenth-century Syrian Cypriot testator within the Jacobite church of Nicosia.\footnote{54} Although this structure has vanished, one wonders if it had the same shape as the elegant wall recess in the vestibule of the Syrian-rite church of Agios Georgios Exorinos in Famagusta (fig. 18),\footnote{55} or maybe that of the even more striking wall niches lining the nave of the Byzantine-rite church of Saint George of the Greeks, built in Gothic forms in the 1360s as the Orthodox metropolitan church (fig. 19).\footnote{56} 366-67; Brunehilde Imhaus, "Un monastère feminin de Nicosie: Notre-Dame de Tortose," in *Dei Gesta per Francos. Études sur les croisades dédiées à Jean Richard*, ed. by Michel Balard, Benjamin Z. Kedar, and John Riley-Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 389-401, esp. 400-401; Jean Richard, "Un but de pèlerinage: Notre-Dame de Nicosie," in *Mosaic*, vol. 135-38; Imhaus, *Lacrimae cypriae*, vol. 1, pp. 62-63. Although the representation of the *gisant* on the front side of the sarcophagus is unusual in French tradition, it is rather widespread in Italian tomb sculpture; see Bauch, *Das mittelalterliche Grabbild*, pp. 158-60.

\footnote{52} Figure 17 was taken on February 2, 2004, and figure 18 on June 11, 2005; from this evidence, it is clear that the vandalism took place between my two visits. Enlart’s and Imhaus’s idea that the tomb was not originally included in the canopied structure has also been questioned by Philippe Plagnieux and Thierry Soulard, "L’église des Bénédictines Notre-Dame de Tortose," in *L’art gothique en Chypre*, pp. 170-75, esp. 175.

\footnote{53} The relevant examples, dating from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, have been collected by Imhaus, *Lacrimae cypriae*, vol. 1, pp. 261-87.


\footnote{56} Enlart, *Gothic Art*, pp. 253-58; Jeffery, *A Description*, pp. 147-51; G. Sotiriou, *Ta βεβαιωσμένα μνημεία της Κύπρου*
In such cases, the Eastern Christian rule of the unity of liturgy within sacred spaces prevents us from thinking that such structures originally included altars, and we can only imagine that they were intended as burial places. Nonetheless, their elongated shape as well as their Gothic features and, most of all, their location within the church interiors (instead of within annexed spaces, as was usual in Byzantium) attest that they had much in common with the Latin model of the niche-chapel. Several other instances of such structures are preserved within stylistically mixed buildings in the Cypriot countryside, such as those in Agia Marina at Phrenaros, Agios Andronikos at Liopetri, and the Panagia at Choulou, which display interesting cycles of *pro anima* murals with holy people and supplicating donors. Such programs are replicated in a few fourteenth- through sixteenth-century pointed-arched icons that were meant to be set within such wall niches or analogous structures, and


which prove to be morphologically related to the lunette-shaped panels used to decorate tombs in late medieval Italy. Among the latter, there is at least one monument whose enormity, solemnity, and complex decoration program point to a closer imitation of Italian wall niches: the Gothic tomb of Saint Mamas in his shrine at Morphou (fig. 20), which is contained within a tall recess embellished by an elegant extrados displaying foliate ornaments and filled with a set of round-arched and quadrangular icons. This odd solution has no precedent in the history of Eastern Christian icon painting and church furnishings, and its features prove to be very close to the composite and odd-shaped panels employed in Italy for the decoration of minimal units of sacred space, such as wall chapels and diminutive churches (fig. 21). This may be because Morphou, even if it was officiated by a Greek priest, was a transconfessional place of pilgrimage, shared by both Latin and Greek Cypriots as well as by visitors from western Europe, who were told that Mamas was a German holy man. It was probably not by

59 For relevant examples, see Athanasios Papageorgiou, *Icons of Cyprus* (Nicosia: Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus, 1992), figs. 48, 73, and 98.


chance that the tomb of this saint, believed to pour forth a most holy myron, was included within an architectural structure that echoed the contracted chapels used in Latin church interiors to commemorate the dead and solemnize their holy protectors. Indeed, this is hardly surprising if one considers that, as so often happened on this culturally mixed island, each community was accustomed to freely appropriating and taking advantage of the artistic models and formal solutions worked out by their neighbors, provided that they proved useful for the pursuit of spiritual benefit and for the sake of their souls.