

KYRENIA REGION HISTORY AND CULTURE

The cultural heritage of the Kyrenia region may come under two big periods: the ancient times (from the last stage of the Neolithic Era, 8th – 7th millennium BC) until Christianity (45 AD) and the Christian times (from 400AD until nowadays). In the Mycenaean period (1350-1050) the first city kingdoms are founded in the Kyrenia region and elsewhere in Cyprus and flourish tremendously. Lapithos considered to have been constructed by Praxandros and Laconian settlers from Therapni and Kyrenia by Cepheus and settlers from Achaia are listed amongst them. The tombs and the sanctuaries in Lapithos and Saint Irena become our source of information about the different stages of such historical background.

After the ancient kingdoms were abolished, Kyrenia became a municipality. It is referred to as "The Municipality of the Kyrenians" on an inscription dated back to the 1st century AD. In 330 AD, following the Roman Empire split into western and eastern part, Cyprus became a region of the Byzantine Empire and it has experienced the same fate throughout centuries as the rest of the Hellenic Orthodox world. A rich artistic and architectural heritage of the Keryenia region was passed down from the Byzantine period, with churches and monasteries decorated with portable icons and magnificent frescoes, like those in Chrysokava. Then Keryenia castle, Byzantine parts of which still exist was built, as well as the octagonal church of Saint George dated back to the 12th century.

In 1191 Cyprus was conquered by the crusaders and in 1192 the island was sold to the Franks Lusignan. The Frank kings undertook expansion works in the Kyrenia castle, which they reinforced indeed; furthermore, they had the city surrounded with walls and the port fortified.

Magnificent gothic churches like the Bellapais Abbey were then built. From 1489 until 1571 Cyprus remained under the Most Serene Republic of Venice and experienced the renaissance art, the Antifonitis church fres-



coes in Kalogrea being a typical example. During the Ottoman dominance period (1571-1878), a decline in arts and letters was observed in the Keryneia region and the island of Cyprus. However, the Greek

language and the orthodox Christian faith remained alive despite the circumstances. In the 19th and the 20th century folk art flourished in the region and art works were produced in all art sectors: architecture, needlecraft, weaving, pottery, goldsmithery and woodcarving).

A CULTURE IS LOST

The Kyrenia region, rich in historical and cultural resources for thousands of years has since 1974 been occupied by the Turkish troops. The Turkish occupying forces have brought settlers from Turkey aiming to alter the demographic profile of the island; moreover, Turkish place names are given to areas of the large island of Cyprus, replacing therefore the original Greek place names, as the Turkish occupying forces pursue their goal to delete every trace referring to the Hellenic cultural identity of the country. The situation in the northern part of Cyprus, which is out of control after 1974, encourage and facilitate the development of an illicit trade of antiquities network, aiming to delete the cultural heritage of the area. The illicit trade activities of antiquities as encouraged and supported by the Turkish army, has been highly profitable for the stakeholders, since Cypriot treasures have already been decorating elements of private collections in many countries all over the world. A great many churches in the Kyrenia region and in the rest of the Turkish occupied Cyprus have been plundered, van-



dalised and misused in different ways. Thousands of icons, sacred vessels, sacerdotal vestments, manuscripts and a good deal of frescoes have been cut into pieces and sold abroad. The disaster is not limited to the orthodox churches but it extends to churches and sacred places representing worship places of other religious groups living in the region, like Maronites, Armenians, Roman Catholic and Protestants.



The devastation of the environment along the Pentadaktylos mountain range stands for a further aspect of the disaster occurred; the situation on the mountain range has been aggravated due to the out of control construction business launched there and mainly in areas being significantly important for the ecosystem. The intense quarry activities carried out along the Pentadaktylos range is highly threatening for the biodiversity of the area. Furthermore, the military infrastructure and activities taking place in pure nature, putting badly livestock out to feed, the occupying regime introducing species strange to the natural ecosystem of the area, pumping excessive quantities of water followed by the consecutive change in the aquatic balance of areas in pure nature, waster-rejecting in such areas etc, come up to be dreadfully threatening.

The Cypriot government, the Church of Cyprus, the Municipalities of the Kyrenia region, the cultural foundations and the academic community follow with alarming feelings this unprecedented disaster of the cultural and environmental heritage affecting the Kyrenia region and make an appeal so that the occupation forces and mainly Turkey may give permission for tackling repair, restoration and renovation works in relation to all the archaeological and religious monuments in the occupied part of Cyprus without exception, including the cemeteries for returning the sacred vessels, which decorated the churches to their legal owners for respecting the right to religious freedom and for saving the area environment already experiencing severe disaster.



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PROMOTION OF CULTURAL VALUES THROUGH PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

