

# The Armenian Church and Monastery Restoration Project



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*With contributions by Stefano de Vito*

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# The Armenian Church and Monastery Restoration Project



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**Foreword by Christopher Louise**  
Programme Manager, UNDP-ACT

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), has been supporting a range of peace-building projects in Cyprus since 1998. Restoring the island's cultural heritage has been an important dimension of this effort. The aim is not only to conserve buildings and sites, but also to provide Cypriots with the opportunity to reconnect with their common heritage. These projects bring people together around a common and inclusive vision of a shared future.

The restoration of the Armenian Church and Monastery complex in the Arabahmet neighbourhood of Nicosia is one example of this initiative. The completion of this project comes at a crucial time in the process of finding a settlement for the Cyprus issue. It is a reminder of the potential of cultural heritage initiatives to help heal the wounds of the past and to build trust among Cyprus' communities. The individuals and groups who participated in the restoration of the Armenian Church affirmed the values of trust, tolerance and respect. These values were expressed at every level of the project from the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the planning and design, to the broad-based consultations that ensured that the physical work always respected the communities' memories of the site.

UNDP and USAID are proud of the achievements of the Armenian Church and Monastery restoration project and hope it will demonstrate how places, as well as projects, can flourish in an environment of peace and goodwill.

# The Armenian Church and Monastery project

The scholarly investigation and conservation of the Armenian Church complex in the Arabahmet neighbourhood of Nicosia, began in 2007. The restoration of this extraordinary fourteenth-century building and its environs is one of several UNDP-ACT projects aimed at renewing the physical and cultural landscapes of Cyprus.



The church is located in the Arabahmet district in the western quarter of the walled city of Nicosia. The entire neighbourhood has been undergoing restoration since 1989, as part of the Nicosia Master Plan.

The current Armenian Church was originally part of a Benedictine monastery built near the beginning of the fourteenth century. Most of the ancillary buildings associated with the original monastery have been dismantled, but their scattered fragments can be seen in the fabrics of the buildings that have replaced them. The church and the surrounding buildings, now known as the Armenian Church complex, are an architectural record of 700 years of sometimes tumultuous change. The church itself, although remaining one of the most outstanding examples of gothic architecture in Cyprus, has undergone many modifications.

# Historical background

When the Lusignan Kingdom of Cyprus was established in 1192, the capital Nicosia began its transformation from a Byzantine city to a Franco-Gothic one. This transformation accelerated after the fall of Jerusalem in 1267 and Acre in 1291. Refugees from the Levant, in some cases entire monastic communities, relocated to the island and new buildings and new forms of architecture flourished. One example is the Monastery of Our Lady of Tortosa (Nôtre Dame de Tortose), which included the building now known as the Armenian Church in Nicosia (listed Monument of the Second Schedule as per the Antiquities Law, Cap. 31 of 1935).

Grave stone slabs, originally inserted into the floor of the church, date from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. The earliest graves stones, dated between 1312 and 1482, give us the name of the original monastery and its approximate construction date in the early fourteenth century.



**Fig. 2** *Despite many alterations, the church remains an outstanding example of Cypriot gothic architecture. In the walls in the foreground of this photo one can see the outlines of the original fourteenth-century niches, which were filled in during the renovations in the early sixteenth century. The barrel vault in the background and the door on the north wall were added at the same time. (Vitti)*



**Fig. 3** *Detail. (UNDP-ACT)*

*The earliest grave stones, dated between 1312 & 1482, give us the name of the original monastery*

A destructive earthquake in 1491 seriously damaged the church. Some repairs were made immediately, but the building seems to have been left in a semi-derelict state until major renovations were undertaken in the sixteenth century. Architectural and documentary evidence, including work done by this project, suggests that the building may have been transferred to the Armenian Church at about this time and these major renovations may have been conducted at the time of this transfer.

There are references to Armenians in Cyprus as early as 578 A.D. and they are mentioned in many histories, travelogues and government documents in the succeeding centuries. The size of the community has fluctuated widely, but there were very close ties between the Frankish Kingdom of Cyprus (1192-1489) and the Kingdom of Armenia, and many Armenians arrived on the island during this period, particularly after the collapse of the Crusader Kingdoms in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Ottomans also recruited Armenian craftsman, who settled in Nicosia. A fire at the Armenian Prelature in 1860 robbed the community of important archives, but it is clear that the Armenian community has deep roots in Cyprus and in the Arabahmet district of Nicosia.

## The history of the church

Even after extensive remodelling and renovations over seven centuries, the fourteenth-century church remains a fine example of Gothic architecture and retains many of its original features. It originally consisted of a single nave divided in two bays, and a polygonal choir covered by ribbed vaults. The windows on the southern side, to the right of the entrance, were smaller than those to the north, to protect the interior from the hot local sun. The choir had typical gothic windows: lancet shaped, divided by a central vertical post called a mullion, and surmounted by a four-leafed quatrefoil design. The original windows were stained-glass, and the walls were covered in plaster painted with blue and red lines to mimic ashlar masonry. The gothic interior, with large windows and white plaster walls would have been full of light.



**Fig. 4** A rare example of Cypriot gothic funerary art, the carved relief of the Abbess Eschive de Dampierre was originally shaped to fit into a niche inside the church. (Vitti)





**Fig. 5** The narrow lance shape of these windows and the decorative, four-leafed quatrefoil tracery are classic features of gothic ecclesiastical architecture. (Vitti)

A cornice divided the windows from the lower wall which was punctuated by niches, one of which can be identified as the original location of the tomb of Abbess Eschive de Dampierre (d. 1340), now located on the northern porch. This tomb is one of the few surviving masterpieces of Cypriot gothic funerary art. The carved relief of the Abbess and her coat of arms is crowned with a gabled cornice and was originally shaped to fit into one of the wall niches.

In the 1491 earthquake the first bay's ribbed vault and the entire western facade collapsed. Traces of this devastating event, such as the ruined northern wall and part of the collapsed ribbed vault, are still visible today, despite many subsequent renovations. The initial repairs included a wall separating the ruined first bay from the rest of the church and a new access door on the south wall. The church continued to be used in this semi-derelict state for some time.



**Fig. 6** *Traces of the devastating 1491 earthquake, such as this collapsed rib vault, are still visible today. Immediately after the earthquake, some parts of the church were walled off or only partially repaired. The once wealthy Benedictine monastery may have been losing influence by the end of the fifteenth century. (Vitti)*

The reconstruction of the first bay had to wait for some time, probably until the early part of the sixteenth century. At this time there were a series of major renovations including a new barrel vault replacing the old cross vault, and a new porch built on the north side of the church. The addition of the porch meant that the lower parts of the large northern windows were blocked. Many of the niches, including the one where the Abbess Eschive de Dampierre's tomb was located, were walled up and a new entrance was opened from the new porch into the church. The result would have been a darker, but larger church. These modifications transformed the Benedictine church to a church more suitable for the Armenian denomination, with less light, a porch on one side of the church and, at a later date, a raised area in the choir, reserved for the altar and the priests.

*...these modifications transformed the Benedictine church to a church more suitable for the Armenian denomination*

Other architectural and documentary evidence suggests the Church was handed over to the Armenians between 1491 and 1504 A.D.

Stylistically, the modifications described in the previous paragraph exhibit the strong Venetian influence present in sixteenth-century Cypriot architecture. Many Venetian architectural features, such as drop arches, profile mouldings and masons' marks, were used in Cypriot architecture during this period and the reconstructed first bay and the new porch clearly show this new architectural language.

By the time of these renovations, the ancillary buildings of the monastery had been dismantled and the remains of these buildings were used in the construction of new houses. The Melikian Mansion, a house to the east of the church, was built by a wealthy merchant around the sixteenth century. It is distinguished by a well-protected storage/treasure room on the ground floor, an arched loggia on the first floor and a nicely carved arched stone gate on the same side as the loggia.

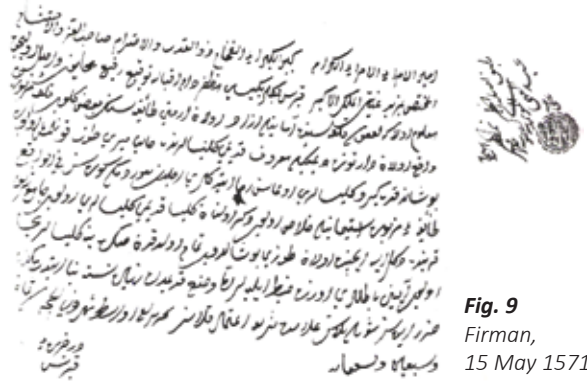


**Fig. 7** *Masons' marks were used to indicate either the proper placement of a stone or the name of the workshop they came from. These marks were a feature of Venetian masonry and became common in Cyprus in the sixteenth century along with many Venetian architectural motifs. (UNDP-ACT)*



**Fig. 8** *This carved stone gate marked the entrance to the beautiful and well-fortified Melikian mansion. By the sixteenth century much of the original Benedictine monastery had been dismantled and the stones were used in new buildings. (BCD Progetti)*

A firman (decree) issued 15 May 1571, less than a year after the Ottoman conquest in September 1570, gave the church to the Armenians. The firman also indicates that the church had been used for an unspecified time as a place to store state salt. This document bears witness to the upheaval of the Ottoman siege, and its aftermath.



**Fig. 9**  
Firman,  
15 May 1571

Apart from the transfer of the premises of the Metropolis to the west side of the site during the tenure of the Metropolitan Akob (1783-1799), little is known about the complex between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, there was a burst of construction activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1858, after the collapse and reconstruction of the central part of the northern porch of the church, new buttresses were built to support the porch. The buttresses were composed of heavy pillars placed a short distance from the porch and connected to it by arches. This arrangement provided support, while leaving the area close to the porch as free as possible from structures. Hapetic Nevrouzian of Constantinople donated a belfry in 1860, which was added to the north side of the church. The date of the construction is recorded on the surviving bell.

The Church underwent minor repairs in 1884, and in 1903-4 it was heavily remodelled; the wall surfaces were re-plastered with gypsum plaster, the remarkably carved ancient wooden doors, described by the French historian Camille Enlart, were sawn off and the windows were filled with new wooden sashes and panes of white and blue glass. The flat roof was covered with a pitched roof with French tiles.

Throughout much of the twentieth century the Church and the surrounding complex were used by the Armenian community for religious and cultural purposes. Due to its proximity to the buffer zone, which was established in Nicosia following intercommunal tensions in 1964, the site was largely abandoned and by the time the UNDP project began in 2007 the building had not been used as a church for decades.



**Fig. 10** Photo courtesy of Asdvadzadzin

# Restoration

## Philosophy and planning

The restoration project was developed in a uniquely participatory manner. A wide range of stakeholders, including the Armenian community in Cyprus, were involved in every step of the project. One of the project goals was to facilitate the capacity building of local expertise, so in addition to continuous interaction between the design team, the stakeholders, and the conservation and restoration workers, two technical workshops were conducted on site.



**Fig. 11** *By 2007 the site was in urgent need of attention. As a first step, the historical and cultural importance of each building was assessed, as well as its state of repair. (BCD Progetti)*

# Condition of the site before the project

When the design phase began in 2007, large portions of the site were in need of immediate intervention, while others had already collapsed. The church, with the possible exception of the northern porch, had not suffered serious structural damage. However, broken and missing windows and a leaking roof, combined with the humid climate, had created the circumstances for heavy material damage. In addition, the gypsum and cement plasters used in previous renovations and repairs had damaged both the interior and exterior walls. Some of the soft sandstone blocks were crumbling and intervention was needed to prevent further deterioration.



**Fig. 12** Modern plasters that were chemically incompatible with the sandstone, cement mortar repairs and the humid climate of Nicosia together reduced some blocks to dust. (BCD Progetti)

Melikian's Mansion (Building B in the foldout site plan, page 30) suffered the most severe damage. Most of the roof had collapsed or was tile-less, leaving the rooms unprotected. The woodwork in the traditional Cypriot false ceiling had suffered serious damage and rain had heavily eroded the mudbrick masonry. The overall structural condition was critical, especially the loggia on the eastern side of the mansion, which was near collapse. The other buildings, including the schools and the premises of the Prelacy, needed to be secured against future deterioration.

**Fig. 13** Most of the roofs had collapsed or were tile-less, leaving the buildings unprotected. The wooden and mudbrick features were in urgent need of intervention. (Vitti)



## The conservation and restoration plan

The goals of the project were to preserve all of the buildings in the compound for future generations, while maintaining their historical and social integrity, and to use the restoration and conservation process as an opportunity for dialogue and reconciliation. One of the design phase challenges was the multiple approaches necessary given the distinct historical, scientific and social significance of each building; it was necessary to distinguish between the buildings that had an unquestionable value as “works of art”, such as the Armenian Church and Melikian’s Mansion, and those that had primarily architectural or social value, such as the school buildings.

These challenges were shared with the stakeholders and with the communities with historical ties to the site, and the final design proposal was a result of these collaborations. The aim was not to return the church or the site to its original state, but to preserve the rich historical layers contained within the site. Each historical transformation was given equal value; together they express the unique history of the monument. The only exceptions to this approach were some additions that were physically and chemically incompatible with the preservation of the underlying stonework. In the end, the proposal contained four different types of interventions: conservation, restoration, reconstruction and, in very limited cases, reversal of those previous interventions that may have compromised the structure.



**Fig. 14** *The church and the associated buildings and spaces were the centre of the Armenian community and were used for educational and social purposes as well as religious ones. (Photo courtesy of Melkonian school)*

*The aim was not to return the church or the site to its original state, but to preserve the rich historical layers contained within the site*

The first stage of the design phase included archival research and a complete survey of the site. The condition of the site and of the buildings was scientifically recorded in new drawings, which were then compared to archival sources in order to understand the evolution of the site. For all of the buildings, other than the church, the aim was to restore them to functioning architectural conditions and to preserve them against future deterioration. Melikian's Mansion was immediately secured from further collapse and protected by a temporary roof, but its complete restoration was postponed until a later date.



## The design for the site

The new design for the site balances two distinct factors. On the one hand, it respects the Armenian community's partitioning of the exterior space into three courtyards: Melikian's Mansion's courtyard; the courtyard between the church and the main gate on Victoria Street; and the courtyard north of the church. On the other hand, changes in the neighbourhood and the public spaces around the site, as well as changes that have occurred during the last decades within the boundary walls could not be ignored. The new layout is thus based on the historical use of the space, but also links the courtyards to the wide public area that today lies to the north of the church.

Following this plan, the area between the church and the Victoria street doorway, an area used for both social and religious events that was already partially paved, was given a new stone paving. In addition, a tamped earth paving now links the northern courtyard, via a new gate, to the adjacent public space. The new access highlights the nineteenth-century belfry built on the north elevation of the church and located just in front of the new gate. The wall that originally separated Melikian's Mansion from the rest of the site will be rebuilt to restore the third courtyard.



**Fig. 15** *The belfry and the buttresses were the last major additions to the church. (Vitti)*

# The intervention on the church

The conservation and structural stabilization of the fourteenth-century church and its sixteenth-century porch were the most critical and the most technically challenging aspects of the project. The removal of the cement and gypsum plasters and the complex structural restoration of the porch required both creativity and flexibility.

Methods had to be continually modified during the restoration work, in response to unexpected architectural problems that were encountered.

For each challenge, the team developed new techniques using a step-by-step methodology. First, the technique was tested on samples, in order to adapt the procedures to the actual condition of the building and to verify the compatibility of the materials. Then the procedures were honed to ensure that they did not cause any damage, and finally the overall aesthetic result was considered. Only when the team was completely satisfied that they had identified the best possible technique was it adopted.

## Structural intervention

Structural decay had seriously damaged the porch, which was near to collapse. The pillars had been gradually overturned by the thrust coming from the heavy load of the vault and the roof above. This slow but steady pressure had distorted the overall geometry of the vault and some of the wedge-shaped stone voussoirs, which form part of the arches, had fallen or were about to fall. All the columns of the porch were visibly inclined outwards. Structural decay was also visible on the north side of the church. The most serious problems were deep cracks in the choir's ribbed vault.



**Fig. 16** At the beginning of the project, the porch was in imminent danger of collapse. Every one of the pillars was slanted, and the buttresses were cracking. (BCD Progetti)

Soil tests and georadar records established that the damage was not caused by the settlement of the foundation. A three-dimensional model of the church was used to simulate its behaviour under different types of stress and allowed the design team to determine that the cracks in the church vault had been caused by the nineteenth century addition of the heavy bell tower. They also established that the structure, after the initial damage, had stabilised; therefore, the cracks on the vault under the bell tower could be safely filled in without extra support being added.

The structural damage to the porch was caused by two factors: the heavy load on the vaults and the corrosion of the iron tie rods. In both cases, the design team chose an “intervention without alteration” strategy. The buttresses built in the nineteenth century to support the sixteenth century pillars were themselves widely cracked and tilting. Instead of adding new structures, or repairing the old repairs, the engineers chose the more effective, yet challenging, option of restoring the porch’s earlier configuration, load and tie rods efficiency. To do this they had to apply a force equal to the force that had caused the porch to collapse (mainly gravity), but in the opposite direction (i.e., upwards). In other words, they decided to literally push the porch back to its original position.



The challenge was to re-establish the upward thrust in the reverse sequence to which the collapse had occurred. Once the vaults were repositioned they would help to push the arches back to their original position; once the drift of the arches was reduced, it would be possible to apply an external push to the columns and re-establish the original geometry of the whole addition. The force applied had to be strictly controlled to avoid crushing the fragile sandstone used for the porch structure.

**Fig. 17** The engineers chose the more effective, yet challenging, option of restoring the porch’s earlier configuration. (UNDP-ACT)

The first step in this process was to shore up the vault; the next step was to decrease the substantial weight of overlying fill, to prevent the porch from slowly collapsing again. Like every other part of this project, this led to unexpected discoveries. When the team dismantled the floor of the terrace, which formed the roof of the porch, they uncovered a series of terracotta pots, which had been used by the original builders in an attempt to lighten the weight on the supporting structure. These pots have been protected and left in their original location.



**Fig. 18** *Terracotta pots, used by sixteenth-century masons to lighten the load on the porch, were discovered when the heavy terrace floor, seen on the left of the photo, was removed. (BCD Progetti)*

In the next step, the joints between the stones in the vaults were cleaned to allow each separate element to be moved without creating new cracks. Three temporary steel buttresses were then erected around the porch. Each exerted 20 tons of force on the arches via their hydraulic jacks. Once all of these preparatory steps were completed, the porch could be moved in carefully calculated and controlled steps, a few centimetres at a time. At each step, the geometrical layout was fixed, and the tension was transferred to the new stainless steel tie rods. After many cycles, the initial goal was reached and the porch was fully restored, without having to substitute a single stone. The final stage involved backfilling the masonry joints and restoring the ancient drainage along the top of the buttresses.

# Removing the plaster and restoring the masonry

During the design phase, conservators tested several methods for removing the modern plasters from the interior surfaces of the church. These trials were essential to ensure that the adherent cement plasters could be removed without further damaging the decayed stone. The conservators also needed to detect and preserve the rare and extremely thin fragments of the original fourteenth-century lime plaster.



**Fig. 19** The project engineers invented a technique using hydraulic jacks to literally push the collapsing sixteenth-century porch upright, one centimetre at a time. The circle in the picture shows the gap between the original prop, and the location of the arch after it has been slowly pushed back into place. (BCD Progetti)



**Fig. 20** A conservator from the Istituto Centrale del Restauro tests the original plasters during the Assessment of the Church. One of the most technically challenging tasks was to remove the modern plaster that was damaging the underlying stone, without damaging the traces of older plaster beneath it. (Vitti)

Once the plasters were carefully removed, the stone surfaces had to be cleaned. Given the time-consuming nature of cleaning the stone manually, a modified sand-blasting procedure was tested and approved. At the end of this stage the entire stone surface was completely clean and it was possible to proceed to the next stage: the consolidation or substitution of the crumbling stones.

As the project progressed it became clear that over the years the addition and removal of plaster and other materials, and the humid conditions, had so damaged the original stonework that some degree of stone restoration and even replacement was necessary. The most damaged stones were found on the southern exterior surface and the interior vaults. Different intervention strategies had to be devised for these two areas.



**Fig. 21** The portion of the wall within the tape has been sandblasted. After careful testing, this technique was used to remove the last thin layer of modern mortar that could not otherwise be removed without harming the stone. (BCD Progetti)



**Fig. 22** Conservators injected liquid consolidants into the pulverised stones, to strengthen the decayed stone. This allowed the project to preserve many of the damaged original stones. (BCD Progetti)

Stones with minor damage were consolidated and preserved; only stones that were disintegrating into fragments and dust, and thereby threatening the stability of the masonry were replaced. This respect for the authenticity of the fabric required a careful stone by stone examination before any decision regarding consolidation or substitution was approved. This minimum intervention strategy was applied to all surfaces, but the substitution of the stones on the exterior surfaces was more extensive, due to climatic factors, which both increased the weathering of the stone and reduced the penetration of the consolidating material.

The final and most delicate phase of the intervention was the aesthetic presentation of the newly cleaned and conserved walls. First, to match the new stones to the existing stone surface, the new stones were roughened along the edges with a chisel wherever the neighbouring stones were visibly decayed. For similar aesthetic reasons the new stone surfaces were treated with a coarse-toothed bush hammer, making them look more like the ancient ones.

**Fig. 23** *Masons used coarse-tooth chisels to mimic the effects of historical stone-cutting techniques and weathering so that the new stone blocks would blend with the ancient ones. (BCD Progetti)*



For the interior surfaces, the aesthetic treatment took into account three considerations: the historical appearance of the interior, the need to integrate the fragmentary plasters from different historical periods, and the memories of the people who had used the site in their youth. The original fourteenth-century surfaces such as the walls, colonettes, ribs and vaults had been coated with a very thin painted lime plaster. The barrel vault and the porch, built some two hundred years later, had a much thicker plaster, much of which had been removed during the twentieth century. To preserve the aesthetics of the church, it was necessary to propose a finish that could match and preserve the historic plasters, while still matching the memories of the people who had used the church.

The fourteenth century surfaces were painted with a very light lime wash mixed with stone dust in order to suggest the tone of the fourteenth-century plaster, while leaving visible the texture of the ashlar masonry and the fragmentary original plasters. The sixteenth century surfaces and the more recent additions were fully plastered, clearly distinguishing them from the more ancient ones.

## New discoveries

Each stage of restoration revealed a wealth of new information about the site. Two unexpected discoveries were the gratings used in the original gothic windows and two painted bosses on the key of the vault. The former, exceptionally important for Cypriot gothic architecture, were the original metal gratings that supported the gothic stained glass. These gratings had been visible before the intervention, but had been interpreted as modern gratings. The removal of the gypsum plasters used to wall up the windows revealed that these gratings ran the height of the window and belonged to the original fourteenth-century church. These are, to our knowledge, the only known examples of stained glass window supporting structures in Cyprus. The metal was treated to preserve it for years to come.



**Fig. 24** *These metal gratings supported a stained-glass window in the original fourteenth-century church. (Vitti)*

The second discovery was two decorated bosses. After removing the thick gypsum layer from the key stones at the intersection of the vaults' ribs, two delicately carved surfaces came to light. The boss at the intersection of the second bay is a simple pattern with leaves that circle the central area, while the boss above the choir is an impressive agnus dei. This "Lamb of God" is represented in the traditional form of a lamb looking backwards, holding in its right foreleg a Christian banner with a cross.



**Fig. 25** *The removal of thick layers of gypsum plaster from the bosses, on the ceiling revealed two intricately carved surfaces. The most elaborate design was an agnus dei. This 'Lamb of God' is a common Christian symbol. (Vitti)*

*Each stage of restoration revealed a wealth of new information about the site*



The removal of the gypsum plaster from the walls also uncovered many fragments of the original plaster, only a few millimetres thick. Remains of the colours demonstrate that the walls and the ribs were painted with straight red lines imitating the joints of ashlar masonry. The central mullions of the windows were also painted red and both the bosses have traces of the original red paint. During restoration these plasters were treated in order to highlight the fragments and make them visible from floor level.

The intervention on the southern window (formerly a doorway) also involved the cleaning and consolidation of the remains of a mural of St. Paul in the flat semi-circular lunette above the old doorway. It probably originally framed a painted image of the Virgin, which is now lost.

## Legacy

Everyone involved in this undertaking recognized that it was much more than a routine cultural heritage project. Restoring the monument was obviously rewarding for its own sake, but the revitalized space is also both an example of, and an opportunity for, inter-communal harmony. Furthermore, the transfer of skills and knowledge and the building of local expertise will have a long-term durable impact on cultural heritage in Cyprus. The project illustrates how people with a shared vision can achieve the seemingly impossible. It also illustrates the value of embracing participatory approaches at every stage of the undertaking.



**Fig. 26** Church interior after the restoration. (UNDP-ACT)

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# Structural timeline of the site

- **Early fourteenth century:** Construction of the church with two cross-vaulted bays and five-rib choir as part of Our Lady of Tortosa Monastery

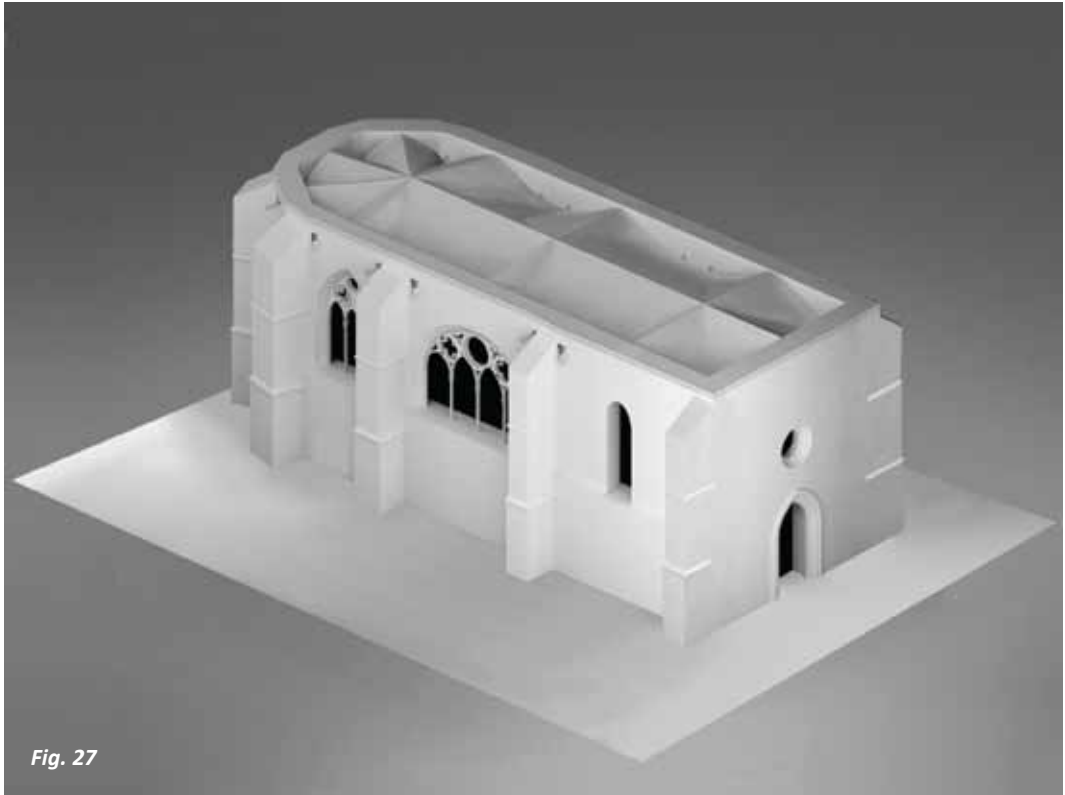


Fig. 27

- **1312-1482:** Various burials (recorded by T. J. Chamberlayne, 1894) including
  - 1340- burial of Abbess Eschive de Dampierre in the Church
  - 1348- burial of thirteen nuns who died of the Black Death
- **1491:** Destructive earthquake causes the collapse of the church's first bay vault; the first bay is walled off from the rest of the church; a new doorway is opened on the south side
- **Early Sixteenth century:** Reconstruction of first bay vault and western facade; opening of the new north entrance; construction of the porch; walling up of niches and door passage in the apse; filling of the lower part of most of the windows



- **Beginning of the sixteenth century:** According to “Anagnosmata” ([1504] cited in Chebeyan 1955), the church was at this time in the hands of Armenians
- **15 May 1571:** Firman issued giving the church to the Armenians, after it had been used to store state salt
- **1688:** Restoration of the church
- **1783-1799:** Metropolitan Akob moves the premises of the Metropolis from the east side of the church to the present location in the west courtyard
- **1788:** Construction of a baptistery
- **Eighteenth to Nineteenth centuries:** Changes to the choir (new raised area, tiled surface facing the two bays and a wooden ciborium added to the altar, merging with the carved timber work from an older ciborium)
- **1858:** Construction of buttresses to support the porch
- **1860:** Construction of belfry, made possible by a donation of Hapetic Nevrouzian from Constantinople



- **1884:** Restoration of the church
- **1886:** Construction of Vartanaz school in front of the porch (replaced by building C in 1950)
- **1904:** Restoration of the church; the wall surfaces were plastered, ancient wood doors sawn off, the windows filled with new wood sashes with white and blue glasses
- **1921:** Construction of Melikian school (building D)
- **1938:** Construction of Ouzonian school (building E)
- **1945:** Women's gallery donated by the Dicran Ouzounian family
- **1950:** Restoration of the belfry (iron tie rods)
- **1950:** Construction of the nursery school (building C)
- **1960:** Renewal of church floor; some grave stones were removed from the floor at this time

# Legend

The red lines indicate buildings that have collapsed or been demolished since the 1927 Land Registration and Survey Department survey.

**A:** Armenian Church (Nôtre Dame de Tortose)

**B:** Melikian's Mansion: B1 (original mansion north building) B2 (original mansion south building)

**C:** Nursery (built 1950)

**D:** Melikian school

**E:** Ouzounian school

**F:** Armenian Prelacy office

**f:** Fountains

**G:** Western wing of Melikian house with a two-storey C-shaped portico (collapsed). A door in the western boundary wall connected the house to the Armenian Church

**H:** Two-storey buildings to the North of B1 (collapsed). Accessible from another staircase on the north side of the H elevation

**L:** One-storey room belonging to building H (collapsed). This building replaced a grander two-storey building, part of H, recorded in Kitchener's 1881 map

**M:** Two-storey building (collapsed) leaning against the corner of building B1

**N:** One-storey building, (collapsed) with a later addition above the first floor, connecting B1 to G

**P:** One-storey building (collapsed)

**Q:** One-storey boy-scout building (collapsed)

**R:** Two-storey building (collapsed). This was a private house bought by the Armenian Prelature, which collapsed after 1963. All that remains of this building are the entrance and a door on Victoria Street

**S:** One-storey building

**T:** One-storey building (demolished) replaced with the Ouzonian school (E)

**U:** One-storey building replaced in 1950 with the nursery. Building U was the old Vartanaz boys' school already visible in Kitchener's map

**V1:** Collapsed part of building B2 (still standing in 2002)

**V2:** Partially collapsed part of building B2. The upper storey was made of mudbrick



**Fig. 30** Ground map of the Armenian Church and Monastery Complex



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