



The Church of Panagia tou Moutoulla

REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
DEPUTY MINISTRY OF TOURISM

According to the inscription on the north wall of the church, the church was erected by John Moutoullas and his wife, Irene in 1280. The church is single-aisled and is surrounded by an enclosed portico on its north and west side, the construction of which is estimated around the 14th – or 15th century.

Inside the nave there are wooden partitions (pilasters) that aimed to the partial division of the church. There are two entrances of 1.75 meter tall leading to the nave, one on its west and the other one on its north side. The windows are few and small. In the nave, you will see two rectangular windows on the eastern and western pediment, as well as small lightning openings and one in the apse of the Holy.

The wall paintings are to be found inside and outside the church. the painter of the church is unknown to us.

The uniqueness of the murals of this church lies in that it is the only precisely dated series of Byzantine monumental painting of the 13th century. Many of them as you can see, have undergone severe damage.

Wall Paintings

In the apse of the Holy Bema, the Virgin Mary is depicted with hands raised in supplication with the Child Christ in a medallion in front of her chest.

The Archangels Michael and Gabriel are on the right and left swinging censers. In the lower part of the apse six officiating prelates are depicted, who in sequence from the left are: Saint

Nicholas, Saint Gregory and Saint John Chrysostom. Saint Basil, Saint Epiphanius and Saint Auxibius are on the right.

No wall paintings survive on the eastern pediment. Above the top of the apse of the Holy Bema the inscription concerning the donors of the church survives and the lower part of the Throne covered with traditional embroideries. The Throne is being prepared for the Last Judgement.

In the eastern lower part of the apse are the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary pictured and the words of the Archangel Gabriel to Virgin Mary in an inscription. A streak of light with three rays is radiating towards the Virgin Mary, symbolising the Triune Godhead. The stars above the Virgin symbolise the Eternal Virginity of the Virgin Mary before and after the Birth of Christ. Interlaced snakes are also represented, which is a depiction from Constantinople.

On the pilaster is a cross which could stop or repel the evil, as believed.

On the pilaster of the south wall outside the Holy Bema is pictured the Christ giving his blessing with his right hand, while holding a Gospel with the left one.

On the north wall, the respective pilaster portrays the Virgin Mary in the position of supplication to God. The Virgin Mary plays the role of the intercessor between God and human beings.

Further to the right on the south wall the Virgin Mary is depicted with the Child below the arch. Although the Christ has the face of a child, he has a bald head as if he were an old man; thus, the painter wants to show that he has the wisdom of an old man.

The space above the enthroned Virgin Mary is empty; only the blue-grey colour is being used.

On the right of the Virgin Mary enthroned, the south wall is separated in two zones, like the west and the north one. As in the other churches of similar type, in the top zone is juxtaposed the iconographic programme with the life of the Virgin Mary and Christ, and in the lower part the figures of Saints, Apostles and others.

At the beginning of the south wall is pictured the Birth of Christ, where the central dominating person is the Virgin Mary, larger in dimensions than the other figures. She seats in the centre of the representation in front of a cave with a black background. She reclines to the right looking at the Divine Infant. She holds a local traditional handkerchief.

The Christ is swaddled in a manger. The horse and the ox are behind him, keeping the Infant warm with their breath. The star above the cave shows where the newborn Divine Infant is.

The three Magi approach from the left bringing their gifts, myrrh, incense, gold.

In the top right corner, the angel announces the tidings of the Birth of Christ to the shepherds.

In the bottom right corner the first bath of the newborn Christ is depicted in a round basin by two women. Joseph is in the bottom left corner. We do not know what followed the mural of the Birth in the top zone of the south wall, as the representations have been destroyed. At a later stage, during the 14th -15th century the Presentation of Christ in the Temple was added, which according to the Jewish Law was done 40 days after the birth of the child. The first male

child was brought and dedicated to the temple by his parents. The parents offered lamb or pigeons (the poorest) for the sacrifice

The depiction of the Presentation is being held in front of the Holy Altar, on which a red cover and a closed book lie.

On the right, Symeon gives the young Christ to the Virgin Mary, who stretches out the hands to take the Christ on her lap. Behind the Virgin Mary are Anna and Joseph who holds a pair of birds for the sacrifice.

In the top zone of the west wall are 3 scenes from the Christological cycle: the Raising of Lazarus, (only the right section of the mural survives), the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem and the Crucifixion of the Christ.

The Christ depicted in the centre of the wall-painting, takes big steps towards his friend Lazarus. He stretches out his hand to Lazarus who is upright on the open tomb and calls him to rise. The well-known phrase "Lazarus, come forth " is written in front of Jesus. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, are kneeling at his feet begging him to save their brother. A young man unfolds the shroud of Lazarus, covering his nose so as not to feel the stench .

The Entry into Jerusalem comes next, the triumphal scene of the entry of Christ into Jerusalem (celebrated 1 week before the Resurrection of Christ). The Christ riding a white donkey enters into Jerusalem. He blesses everyone who is approaching to receive him. A child lays his clothes on the ground so that the animal carrying the Christ passes over it. On the left side of the depiction, the Apostles John and Peter follow the Christ.

The third representation in the top zone of the west wall portrays the Crucifixion of Christ. The top right side has been destroyed. Below the Cross the Golgotha is depicted. The Christ is dead on the Cross, with four nails and the head reclines to the right. On his waist a tied local traditional woven article is depicted. Blood and serum run from his rib. On the left of the Cross the Virgin Mary is represented looking at the Christ, with the woman that is accompanying her (it is believed that she is Mary Magdalene). The disciple of the Christ John the Theologian stands on the right side.

In the top zone of the north wall the Descent into Hades (the Resurrection of Christ) and the Dormition of the Virgin Mary are depicted. The representation following the Dormition has not survived. The depiction of the Resurrection is represented in the traditional Byzantine way; its upper part has been destroyed.

Jesus is depicted moving to the right, stepping on the broken gate of Hades and holding a raised cross in his hand, the symbol of victory against death. He lifts up the old Adam with his right hand, and behind him stands Eve, both symbolising the human race that Christ comes to save with his sacrifice.

On the other side are three prophets: David, Solomon and Saint John the Baptist.

The last scene, the Dormition of the Virgin Mary is to be found above the north entrance of the Church. The relic of the Virgin Mary is pictured in the centre of the wall painting. The bed is surrounded by a richly decorated textile. Around the Virgin Mary are the Apostles in grief. On the left, Peter the Apostle is swinging the censur. John is on the right and further back the Apostles Paul and Andrew. In the centre behind the bed is the Christ, whose head is destroyed, holds the soul of his mother in his arms. On top to the right, we see a part of a flying angel.

Like in other similar churches, the bottom zone of the wall paintings depicts a series of Saints, with Christopher, Eustace and Paul being first on the south wall, looking to the left. On the north wall, the corresponding Saints George and Peter are looking to the right.

In the bottom zone of the west wall 6 full-length figures on the right and left side of the entrance are represented. The first figure on the left is damaged and the Saints Athanasia and Mavra come next. When Saint Athanasia became a nun she had a beard in order to resemble a man and not to be recognised by her husband Saint Andronicus, who was also a monk.

On the right section of the west wall the Saints Barbara, Marina (protector of the children), and Anastasia are portrayed.

In the bottom zone of the north wall, on the left of the entrance Saint Stylianos, the Archangel Michael and Saint Peter the Apostle are pictured.

Following the bottom zone east of the north entrance are the mounted Saint George and Saint John the Baptist. The specific anthropomorphic depiction of the dragon that is murdered by Saint George is unique in the respective iconography in Cyprus.

Saint John the Baptist together with the Christ and the Virgin Mary depicted on the two partitions-pilasters, complete the Small Deesis (Supplication). The Deesis on the Pilasters is a characteristic of the 12th century.

In the easternmost point of the north wall, in the Holy Bema, one can read the dedicatory inscription with the depiction of the donors further up. The placement of the donors in the particular space constituted an utmost honour to them.

The artistic value of the murals of Panagia tou Moutoulla lies in that they constitute the only series of wall paintings of the 13th century in Cyprus. It is not a part of a monastic monument; however, it is perhaps the family church of a wealthy family of the region.

On the outside of the west wall of the portico we also have 2 wall paintings, the Christ Enthroned and the mounted Saint George that do not appear to be by the same painter. We have the Last Judgement on the outside of the northern wall, which is depicted to the right and left of the north entrance of the church. The Burning Bush and the Seven Youths of Ephesus are represented in the top zone on the eastern edge of the same wall. Below Saint Barbara and Saint Catherine are portrayed

The Last Judgement and the inscription "The Preparation of the Throne" are depicted outside around the northern entrance. Next to Jesus the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist are pictured followed by the Apostles, with Paul being first to the left of the Christ and then John, Marcus and Andrew. To the right of the Christ is probably Peter followed by Matthew; angels are depicted behind them. Further below are Adam and Eve represented as elderly in the supplication position. Behind and under Adam lies the Hell and nearby is the balance with which the souls will be judged.

Two flying angels with trumpets are gathering the souls, one turning towards the earth and the other one towards the sea, both depicted as women.

The Just and Paradise are portrayed behind Eve.

In front of the steps of Paradise is Peter conversing with Paul and leading a group of persons into Paradise. A chorus of Female Saints and a chorus of Martyrs are also represented with Saint Maria the Egyptian being last.

The two-foiled wood carved south door of the church is one of the very few samples of wood carving surviving in Cyprus from the mid-Byzantine Period.

On the iconostasis there are copies of icons of the Christ and Virgin Mary; the original icons are exposed in the Museum of Kykkos Monastery.