



**The Church of Panagia Podithou (Virgin Mary of Podithou) at
Galata**

CYPRUS TOURISM ORGANISATION

The Church of Panagia Eleousa of Podithou (Virgin Eleousa of Podithou) belongs to the post Byzantine period, and was erected at the beginning of the 16th century, during the Venetian era.

It is a large dimensional monastic church, and is partly painted with murals of the Cypriot Italo-Byzantine Style (by unknown artist). According to the dedicatory inscription on the western facade, Demetre de Coron and his wife Helen were its donors.

The earliest report that we have is the one by Basil Barsky who visited the church in 1735, when there was a cell and 2 monks. The Monastery functioned until 1950.

It is a single church with a large steep-pitched timber roof and has a portico on its 3 sides in the north, west and south.

It has a rectangular shape with the apse slightly beetling at the eastern end, a rare element in this type of churches.

There are a limited number of wall paintings only in the interior.

There are 3 entrances to the nave, the central one on the west wall, another one on the north wall and one more on the south wall. Three more entrances are to be found in the corresponding points of the porticoes with wooden horizontal lintels. Within the church, there are 2 rectangular windows in the eastern pediment, 2 in the western pediment and one more in the apse.

Windows and openings are also to be found on the walls of the porticoes, some of which were closed during reparation works at a later stage.

We begin the description from the Bema, where in the apse the Enthroned Virgin is pictured on a wood carved Throne with Christ in front of her. The

Mother of God wears a red tunic with a blue mantle, according to the western model. She is flanked by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, who bow with devotion to the Mother of God and the Child, holding lit candles.

Behind the throne we see two Cherubim. Below the conch of the apse, there is an inscription referring to the Holy Trinity, stating more precisely that this church was built by the Father, cemented by the Son and restored by the Holy Spirit.

Below the inscription the Communion of the Apostles is depicted. The Christ is represented twice at each of the side doors on the semi-circle of the apse. On the left side he is pictured offering bread and blessing to Saint Peter the Apostle. On the right, he offers wine to Saint Paul the Apostle holding a large jug. Behind the 2 Apostles follow another 5 on each side, waiting their turn to receive the Holy Communion.

On the left side, Judas comes last causing some agitation by turning the head in the opposite direction.

On the east wall of the Bema at the top of the pediment the Holy Mandylion is pictured which symbolises the Incarnation of the Divine Word. On the Holy Mandylion is the miraculous depiction of the head of Christ. According to the tradition, the Mandylion was sent to the ill King Avgarus in Syria, so that he heals.

Underneath, on the right and left side of the rectangular window are two representations from the life of Moses: on the left, Moses receives the tablets with the Divine Law from the hands of God, on a gnarled mountain. On the right, he loses his sandals in front of the Virgin Mary – the Burning Bush which symbolises the Eternal Virginity of Virgin Mary.

Below the representations of Moses, on the east wall of the bema, is the Annunciation of the Virgin. On the left, the Archangel Gabriel is depicted bringing the happy message to the Virgin Mary, who is seated on the right, on a wood carved throne. Various buildings are pictured in the background.

Underneath the Annunciation are depicted the prophets David and Solomon. Most of the wall paintings on the east wall are connected to the life of Virgin Mary and the incarnation.

In the upper part of the north and south walls of the bema, are also pictured six representations from the life of the Virgin Mary, from her childhood and hence.

We begin from the south wall westwards to eastwards, where are pictured: 1) the rejection of the gifts of Joachim and Anna by the Priest as they could not procreate, 2) their return with grief to their house, 3) the announcement for the upcoming birth of a descendant to Joachim by the angel. Two young shepherds are pasturing their sheep, which are drinking water.

We have on the north wall, with direction from the west to the east: 1) the prayer of Anna and the Announcement for procreation, 2) the kiss of Joachim and Anna (north wall in the Bema), and 3) the Birth of the Virgin Mary, where a woman offers food to Saint Anna, and another one is taking care of the baby Virgin Mary.

There is an intense movement in the wall paintings, which is also denoted through the garments folds of the depicted figures.

The artist uses perspective and places the buildings with astonishing mastery in the background of the pictures, reminding the Renaissance painters of the 16th century.

In the nave, the murals are to be found only in the pediment of the west wall, where it has been attributed a multi-persons illustration of the Crucifixion.

The Christ is depicted on the Cross, with the 2 robbers crucified on the right and left, and a crowd of persons underneath watching the sacrifice of the Lord. The Virgin Mary on the left, fainting, is supported by her escorts.

In the centre, kneeling Magdalene is embracing the Cross.

On the right, John, the disciple of Christ is watching with sadness. Below right, 3 soldiers are claiming the tunic of Christ. Around them gathers a multitude of people, soldiers, mounted figures, Jews .

In the lower left corner, an old man watches the fainting Virgin Mary. He is probably the donor.

The representation that you are looking at now is rare in the Byzantine Tradition. Although we observe multi-person depictions of the Crucifixion in the Palaeologue period, however, the specific one has been strongly influenced by the Italian art.

In the nave 2 individual Saints are depicted, dating from the end of the 17th century: most probably, Saint Peter on the north wall and Saint Paul on the south wall.

The external side of the west wall is painted as well; it finishes in a pointed pediment, in the tip of which is the Ancient of the Days blessing, while three tongues of flame come out of his head.

Exactly below is the Virgin Pantanassa enthroned, with the child flanked by 10 prophets who hold scrolls referring to Her.

The Virgin Mary seats on a wood carved throne holding the Christ on her lap.

In the first row of prophets are the Prophets Daniel with the vision of the Virgin Mary in a medallion, and Moses who watches the Virgin Mary as an Inflaming Bush and not as a Burning one.

In the second row are the prophets Abacum and Isaiah with the vision of the Virgin Mary in a medallion.

In the third row is the prophet Gideon with the Virgin Mary in a medallion. Opposite him is the Prophet Ezekiel with the vision of the Virgin Mary in front of a tower-shaped building with door closed, which symbolises the virginity of the Virgin Mary.

In the fourth row on the right is the Prophet Aaron with the flowering stick and next to him, the Prophet Jeremiah. In the same row are Jacob and Zachariah next to a seven – branched candelabrum.

Underneath the Throne of the Virgin Mary are three kneeling figures, the two donors and a monk. Between them, they have the copy of the donated church.

At the bottom of the pediment of the church's western facade, there is an inscription regarding the church and its dedication to the most Holy Mother of God.

Below the inscription is the Descent of Christ into Hades, that is to say the Resurrection. The Christ comes from the left breaking the gates of Hades and pulling out Adam, who is surrounded by Eva and other figures. Behind the Christ are pictured David and Solomon.

On the left and right of the western entrance of the church is the representation of Deesis (Supplication) with the Virgin Mary and Christ, next of whom the preliminary drawing of Saint John the Baptist is distinguished. The Deesis is referring to the judgement of the faithful during the Last Judgement.

The Iconographic Program of the facade of the church emphasises the depictions of the Virgin Mary in the Old Testament, as well as the faith for the salvation of the devout faithful (Descent into Hades, Deesis).

The representations in the Holy Bema are stressing the Incarnation of the Divine Word.

The portable icons also belong to the "Italo-Byzantine" style of the 16th century. Some of them are in the collection of the Bishopric of Morphou. The surviving despotic icons are those of the Christ and the Archangel Michael, and from the Big Deesis those of the Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist, the Apostles and angels, from the Dodekaorton the Christ and the Virgin, as well as the first royal doors and the Christ on the Cross.

The iconostasis bears the coat of arms of the donor De Coron and the lion- symbol of Venice.

The gilding of the iconostasis was made at a later stage, in 1783.