

The Ghosts of Famagusta

by Allan Langdale

In the summer of 1974 Turkey invaded Cyprus, forcibly partitioning the Island into a northern, Turkish sector and a southern region known as Greek Cyprus. The international community interpreted the Turkish exploit as an illegal annexation rather than, as the Turks saw it, a justifiable intervention to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Turkish Cypriots. When the area declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983 the international community refused to recognize it. The occupation of the north meant that only the southern two-thirds of Cyprus continued to be recognized as the legitimate nation of Cyprus, while the north has persevered— propped up by subsidies and immigrants from Turkey—as a ‘military occupied zone’, a designation that has resulted in the region’s economic and cultural isolation for the past forty years. This has had innumerable political and social ramifications for Cyprus and Cypriots, both Greek and Turkish, but one of the more urgent issues is the preservation of archaeological and cultural sites in the north, many of which have been subject to neglect for four decades. The situation has become critical for many historical sites. The following is a report on some of the challenges faced by people trying to conserve the region’s incomparably rich archaeological and architectural past. We routinely hear about the U. S. economic embargos of Cuba and North Korea, but the embargo of northern Cyprus doesn’t get much press. Yet that four decade long prohibition, observed by the United States and by virtually all of the world’s nations, is one of the decisive factors impeding efforts to save the region’s numerous archaeological sites and historical works of architecture. Turkish Cyprus is small, about the size of Rhode Island, yet within its modest confines lay cultural and archaeological treasures in a concentration rarely seen anywhere, and for four decades these monuments have been decaying for lack of protection, conservation and maintenance. Nowhere in Europe are so many important cultural monuments so endangered and so little known to the rest of the world.

Perusing a map one’s impulse might be to look for Cyprus around Crete or one of the other Greek islands of the Aegean, but Cyprus is much further east. It’s only sixty miles from the coast of Syria and forty miles from the southern coast of Turkey, neatly tucked into the upper right-hand corner of the Mediterranean. This Middle Eastern location has been a critical factor in the Island’s long history. When humans first

arrived, around 10,000 BCE, they found an Eden lush with vegetation. There were elephants and hippopotami, stranded millennia before, which had flourished in the absence of predators, but which had become tiny in their island environment—a phenomenon called insular dwarfism. The first humans on Cyprus found these creatures easy quarry—the elephants stood only four feet high—and within a few hundred years had hunted them to extinction. Huge deposits of their discarded, calcified bones can be found today, with many Cypriot folk legends about their origins; one claiming they're the bones of ancient dragons long ago drowned in a cataclysmic flood, and another that they're the bones of Christian martyrs. Well into the twentieth century, Cypriots ground up the bones and mixed the powder with water for a cure-all medicinal.

In later eras, around 1500-1200 BCE, Cyprus was a primary source of copper, the main component of bronze, the material that gave a splendid era its name: the Bronze Age. In fact, the Island's name is derived from the Greek word for copper, *kypros*. At least one large Cypriot city flourished in those centuries, Enkomi, a metropolis of 15,000 citizens, which grew wealthy smelting and exporting copper ingots. Its ruins are quietly overrun by fennel in the springtime, but one can still walk along the narrow streets and see the wellheads of Enkomian households in place after three thousand years. Not far from Enkomi is a huge complex of tombs from around 1200 BCE. Excavators in the early 1960s found monumental graves with beds and thrones of gilded wood decorated with ivory panels. Horses had been buried in front of the tombs so that the deceased kings could ride their chariots in the afterlife. The skeletons still lie eerily in place under greenhouse-like glass canopies, though they have turned to dust for lack of adequate conservation. They did not go easily—the fist-sized stones used to kill them were found lying beside them.

In the Greco-Roman period great cosmopolitan cities such as Salamis, Paphos and Kourion arose and remained prosperous into the Christian era. It was principally the remains of these ancient civilizations that were plundered by the American Ambassador to Cyprus Luigi Palma de Cesnola, whose archaeological larcenies established the core collection of the Metropolitan Museum, for which he was rewarded with the institution's first directorship in 1879. Salamis, perhaps Cyprus's most illustrious ancient city, takes a good part of a day to explore adequately, with its Roman bath complexes, theater, villas, basilicas and other ancient ruins. At the southern tip of

the city, where the sea has inundated the Roman-era necropolis, one can snorkel in the shallows and see ancient sarcophagi, their lids toppled by the waves, giving shelter to schools of tiny fish.

For centuries Cyprus was under the influence of the Byzantine Empire, and in these years innumerable churches and monasteries were built, many with graceful domes and with their interiors filled with frescoes and mosaics. Cities that flourished under the ancient Greeks and Romans continued to thrive under Christian Byzantium, and many of the remains of this glorious past survive either as complete buildings, some still in use, or vast archaeological sites. Some cities seem to have been lost to history, such as Aphrodisium, a north coast city near the base of the Karpas peninsula that seems to have disappeared without leaving much of a trace. Nineteenth century travelers found only mute signs of its existence. Similarly, the large Karpasian city of Afendrika, which flourished in the Roman period, has never been systematically excavated.

The medieval European crusaders who first captured the Holy Land, including Jerusalem, in 1099 CE, bypassed Cyprus in their eagerness to plunder the Middle East for its riches; and plunder it they did. But less than a century later a Muslim commander, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, more popularly known in the west as Saladin, expelled the Christians. They did not, however, return to France. Instead they purchased Cyprus from Richard Lion Heart of England, who had recently conquered it, and thus began the three-century dynasty of the Lusignans, whose forebear was Guy de Lusignan, the last crusader king of Jerusalem. (For those who've seen the Ridley Scott movie *Kingdom of Heaven*, Guy's the bad guy). The Lusignans continued to optimistically crown themselves Kings of Jerusalem whilst on Cyprus, yet they would never regain that sacred and contested realm.

All this is to say that for millennia Cyprus was very much at the center of things as several civilizations waxed and waned. Its strategic position at the intersection of three continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe—ensured its prosperity and cultural complexity. One striking example of Turkish Cyprus's wealth of historical remains is the town of Famagusta, on the east coast of the Island. In the Lusignan age Cyprus became fabulously wealthy and Famagusta, the Island's principal port, was considered the most affluent of cities. The German priest Ludolf von Suchen visited in 1338, at the height of Famagusta's prosperity, observing:

It [Famagusta] is the richest of all cities, and her citizens are the richest of men. A citizen once betrothed his daughter, and the jewels of her head-dress were valued by the French knights who came with us as more precious than all the ornaments of the Queen of France...But I dare not speak of their precious stones and golden tissues and other riches, for it were a thing unheard of and incredible. In this city dwell very many wealthy courtesans, of whom some possess more than one hundred thousand florins. I dare not speak of their riches.

While hyperbole was the stock-in-trade of the medieval chronicler, there is evidence that von Suchen's remarks were accurate. Not only did innumerable traders—and, apparently, prostitutes—make fortunes in the city's rarified commercial environment, but Famagusta also produced one of the Mediterranean's most precious textiles, camlet. This cloth was so valuable that the women who wove it were forbidden to leave the confines of the city's walls lest they be tempted to betray manufacturing secrets to foreigners. The Mameluke Sultan of Egypt, who received tribute from the Lusignan kings, preferred to be paid in camlet rather than gold. It was at the peak of the city's fortunes, in the mid-fourteenth century, that many of Famagusta's French-style gothic churches were constructed along with its stunning two-mile circuit of defensive walls.

In the late fifteenth century the Venetians took control of Cyprus. They, too, left a significant architectural heritage, reconstructing the town's fortifications and updating the city's core in a Renaissance style. Their sovereignty was short-lived: the Ottomans conquered the Island in 1570, merely eighty years after the Venetians had arrived. The last holdout was Famagusta, which resisted a brutal siege for almost a year. Today, one can walk in the moat around the ramparts, seeing catapult balls ensconced in shattered walls and sections where musket fire has pocked the ramparts. Rusting cannon balls sit in grasses where they have lain undisturbed for over four hundred years; mute signs of the great struggle for the city. It was at this time that some of the churches, including the imposing St Nicholas cathedral, were converted to mosques. For three centuries the Ottomans held sway over Cyprus, but Famagusta, once the Island's jewel, waned into obscurity, its desolate ruins housing merely two-hundred impoverished citizens by the mid-nineteenth century; their habitations meager mud brick hovels built up against the ornate medieval stonework of the ancient churches. The wealthy citizens seen by von Suchen centuries before were now ghosts haunting the alleyways between the once glorious, but now crumbling, medieval edifices.

In 1878 the Ottomans granted management of Cyprus to the British in exchange for protection against Russian naval expansion. Thus began a modest revitalization of Famagusta and of Cyprus in general. In 1925, not long after the Ottoman Empire had been dissolved and the modern Turkish Republic was emerging, Cyprus was officially made a British Crown Colony (partly to deflect any claims a nascent Turkish Republic might have upon it) and it continued to prosper until the Greek Cypriots rebelled and gained independence in 1960, an act which initiated a sad decade and a half of escalating ethnic conflict between the Orthodox Greek majority and the Muslim Turkish minority. Greatly outnumbered by Greek Cypriots—many of whom wanted to see the Island become part of Greece and the Turkish population expelled or eliminated—the situation became critical for Turkish Cypriots. It was in response to these grave circumstances that Turkey mounted the military action of 1974 that partitioned the Island.

I first went to Turkish Cyprus in September of 2005 to teach art and architecture at Eastern Mediterranean University in Famagusta. Most westerners wouldn't find Famagusta a very attractive place. It has bad roads, few green spaces, and its summers are blisteringly hot while its winters are damp and chilly. Its skyline is afflicted by an epidemic of concrete apartments and its urban design is complicated by poor planning and the inconvenient presence of both Turkish and UN military bases within city limits. It has only a few decent restaurants (though, as in Turkey, excellent fast food; and because of the embargo, no Western franchises), no museums to speak of, and the dust is so bad that you can mop your floor every day and never keep it clean. It has its vivacity, though—a kind of Levantine, frontier energy—and in time one can develop, as I did, affection for its disarray. But if you talk to Greek Cypriots they'll tell you the town doesn't even exist. They'll tell you it's a ghost city, a city that once was beautiful and thriving but which vanished in August of 1974. In some ways they are right. The Famagusta they knew, specifically an upscale suburb called Varosha—with its shops, cafes, and hotels aside a lovely mile-long beach—is still imprisoned behind an impenetrable barrier guarded by the Turkish military, which uses parts of the area as a base, simply neglecting the rest. It's not all military austerity. Although they've put up high walls to conceal it, there's a 350 meter stretch where a quick check on Google Earth reveals a hundred beach umbrellas. No civilians are allowed access to the ghost city, or to its not-so-top-secret beachside resort. There are many urban legends about this deserted Ghost City: the 1974 Ferrari that forlornly sits, silted with grime, in the

shattered corner showroom of a luxury car dealership, its dreams of speed and pretty girls thwarted; the jumbled mountain of rusting steel safes (ripped from their bank buildings and dragged there by Turkish tanks) piled in a secured area and still containing the valuables left in them forty years ago, which might be a considerable trove indeed, since the Famagusta of the 1970s was one of the Mediterranean playgrounds of wealthy European elites; the two-hundred 1974 Toyota Corollas that had been delivered days before the invasion, which now sit in a car lot where trees have sprung up around them while weeds grow in their dissolving seats and dashboards; the August 15th, 1974 newspaper in the café, held down by a coffee cup that was hastily abandoned as the Turkish army advanced through the city, driving its Greek Cypriot population south; and Sophia Loren's villa, which is now purportedly overtaken, indoors and out, by the tiny bougainvillea that was planted in June of 1974.

Today, visitors to Famagusta can go down to a beach and peer south, under the watchful eye of an armed sentry, to the empty arc of once luxurious hotels, now forbidden and disintegrating. The fate of the ghost city of Famagusta has become the standard story that Greek Cypriots tell visitors to the Republic of Cyprus. The Greeks who lived in Famagusta (or Kyrenia, or Risokarpaso, or Morphou) lost everything. A man once told me of a Greek Cypriot who had made his fortune in London with a small chain of successful restaurants. He sold them all to buy a hotel on Famagusta's beachfront, but his entire investment was lost in a single day. His towering dream slowly crumbles, its only guests over the decades a hundred generations of pigeons, who have turned the twelve-story accommodation into a massive, guano-filled covey.

With the enmity that pervades Cypriot society and politics it is easy to forget that not all Greek and Turkish Cypriots had bad relations in 1974. Before fleeing the advances of the Turkish army many Greeks gave the keys to their homes to Turkish Cypriot neighbors and asked them to water the plants. They thought they'd be back in a few weeks. While Greek Cypriots fled south, Turkish Cypriots later migrated north, they, too, losing whatever they had in the southern part of Cyprus in the forced population exchange. Segregation had a high economic cost, but an even more profound social and human price. Nicosia, Cyprus's capital city for both Greeks and Turkish Cypriots, is still a divided city, as Berlin was during the Cold War, though there are now two checkpoints that are easily crossed today. Far less daunting than the Berlin Wall, the Green Line runs east to west through the circle of the sixteenth-century

Venetian fortification walls, sometimes almost invisible; occasionally indicated merely by a pile of oil drums haphazardly crammed into the end of an alley and decorated with a spray of razor wire and painted with the letters UN in blue to impart a sense of seriousness.

There is a small but dedicated group of people who are working to bring attention to this forgotten quadrant of the Mediterranean and its endangered cultural heritage, particularly Famagusta's. The most energetic of these crusaders is Michael J. K. Walsh. Walsh was born in Northern Ireland in 1968, arriving just in time for a childhood of The Troubles and terrorism, which hit his hometown, Enniskillen, particularly hard; "Worse than Belfast," he told me, shaking his head. He went to the Protestant Portora Royal School for boys, which counts Samuel Beckett and Oscar Wilde among its alumni. Walsh inherited from his Portora forebears both the black humor and an appreciation of absurdity that serves one well when living in Cyprus. Currently, he teaches at Nanyang Technical University in Singapore, only his latest in a series of exotic teaching posts. Walsh was a graduate of York University in London where he'd done a dissertation on the early twentieth-century British artist C. R. W. Nevinson (d. 1946), who was known for his Futurist-inspired depictions of World War I. Walsh traces his interest in the period to finding, as a young boy, a shoebox under his deceased grandfather's bed that contained letters and mementos of Walsh's great uncle who had died in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. These artifacts impressed him and gave him a vivid sense of history. "There was still dried mud on the dog tags," he recalls.

After a brief stint teaching English in Athens, his income supplemented by lecturing on Aegean cruise ships, Walsh got a job in Famagusta in 2002. At the time, gaining employment in northern Cyprus was comparable to getting a job in North Korea today, so thoroughly had the region been isolated from the world at large. His upbringing in Northern Ireland had equipped him well for living in a place where segregation and ethnic hatred were the norm. As strange as Cyprus was, Walsh nevertheless recognized many opposing structures from his home and had the social survival skills needed to negotiate them. Moreover, since the situation in Northern Ireland was slowly moving towards resolution during these years, Walsh also realized that even deeply-rooted socio-religious divisions could be overcome. If his island nation could find a semblance of peace, then so, too, could Cyprus. His life experience equipped him with an optimism few could bring to the table. Walsh himself seems a

reconciliation of several opposites; he's a compelling combination of a leprechaun crossed with a satyr (with the former's mischievousness and the latter's lively persistence); and a working-class Irishman (he worked the night shift in the Walker's potato chip factory while an undergraduate at Leicester Polytechnic) crossed with an elite art historian (he's a Fellow of London's Royal Society of Arts). This, with his blue eyes, quick smile and Irish brogue means that he can charm just about anything with a viable heartbeat. He leans back in his chair and runs his fingers through his blonde, 1970s rock musician hair, describing the time he first walked through the gate of Famagusta's medieval walled city in 2002:

"Here was this unknown town filled with masterpieces of Gothic architecture, some in ruin, some functioning today as mosques or cafes. In some ways I felt as if I was discovering a lost city. Someone had set up a vegetable stand under the half-collapsed vault of a Gothic church, using it as handy shelter from the sun. There wasn't a single tourist. I tried to find out about the place but so little information existed, and there was no contemporary scholarship. I felt I had to tell the world about what was here. The place had been forgotten."

Since medieval architecture was far from Walsh's area of expertise he took what scholarship he could find, much of it a century old, and published reports (he refers to the process as "whistle-blowing") on everything from Famagusta's monumental structures, such as St Nicholas Cathedral, to completely neglected minor things like the ship graffiti that sailors carved in the walls of the churches in the 18th and 19th centuries. One elegant Greek inscription, over a century old, could have been written today: *"How sad I am. Famagusta is ruined. Even if centuries past. However (I am) grateful."* Few places in the world evoke such a sense of tragedy and time past while also somehow eliciting appreciation for having seen it before its eradication. Since his first publications Walsh has organized international conferences and, encouraging others to join him in his quest to put Famagusta on the map, has co-edited three volumes of essays focusing on the old city and its architecture, culture, and history.

His first publications were supported by his Eastern Mediterranean University employers. However, in 2005, as Walsh stepped up his efforts to campaign for Famagusta's future, things became more complicated. Walsh was frustrated that Famagusta could not be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a status it unquestionably deserves. For the Greek Cypriots such international recognition of Famagusta's universal cultural importance would have represented a breaking of the

embargo against the north, so UNESCO had demurred and become in their reticence complicit in Famagusta's isolation. Only states can nominate their sites for inclusion, and since north Cyprus was not recognized as a state, they could not apply.

Alternatively, the Republic of Cyprus—Greek Cyprus—actively lobbied against any nominations for any sites in north Cyprus.

But UNESCO was not the only cultural heritage organization and in 2008 Walsh lobbied for Famagusta's inclusion on the World Monument Fund's watch list of 100 most endangered cultural heritage sites. Walsh was applying on Famagusta's behalf as, in effect, a citizen of the world; an art historian concerned about the fate of the city's future. In the eyes of Greek Cyprus, however, he had broken the embargo and flouted international law. At the same time, the Turkish Cypriot government, not happy about being on the list of the 100 most endangered anything, were angry that he had acted unilaterally and even more furious because he had embarrassed the government, whose inability to properly care for Famagusta's cultural heritage was now being publicized worldwide. North Cyprus was used to being completely ignored by the world. Now, in this first instance of profile-raising, it was something negative.

Perhaps understandably, former colonies are suspicious of outsiders' intentions, and it's very often the case in Cyprus, for foreigners and locals alike, that no good deed goes unpunished. Walsh almost lost his job because of the WMF nomination. He was even accused of being a spy, sent by the Greeks to north Cyprus to discredit the regime. Later, the entire art and archaeology department at EMU was shut down, this in a land where historical architecture and archaeological sites are the region's most defining and unique cultural elements.

Despite the censure, Walsh's efforts, altruistic and non-partisan, gained him some admirers on both sides of the Green Line, the most important being Oktay Kayalp and Alexis Gallanos, two men who have a very odd relationship indeed: they are both the current mayors of Famagusta, Turkish and Greek, though Kayalp actually lives in and administers Famagusta, while Gallanos is a mayor-in-exile, governing over a refugee city council that represents, but does not reside in, the city. After successfully placing Famagusta on the WMF list, Walsh used the publicity to organize a conference in Paris exclusively on the art and architecture of Famagusta, an event that took place on the heels of the release of a documentary film called *Famagusta: the Story of a Forgotten City*, which, in an unprecedented instance of cooperation, both Greek and

Turkish Famagusta municipalities had helped finance. [The Paris conference received the support of one rather special Parisian citizen, Philippe Roux de Lusignan, who, if history had been different, would have been the King of Cyprus today as the last descendant of the medieval Lusignans.]

Walsh continued by organizing relatively uncontroversial evaluative projects, such as having art conservationists assess the condition of fresco paintings. In another instance, he found funding for a team to analyze the architecture of Famagusta's partially ruined fourteenth-century Carmelite church, creating a detailed digital 3-D scan for future restoration work. However, soon the Turkish Department of Antiquities was chafing, disturbed that Walsh was organizing these projects unilaterally, without obtaining their permission or involving them in the projects.

Among the many extraordinary buildings in Famagusta one stands as the exemplar of the general problem: the Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque, which was originally built as the medieval St Nicholas Cathedral. When Walsh first saw this compelling structure he tried to find studies of it. Other than old general guide books, the most comprehensive description had been published in 1899 in Camille Enlart's monumental study of Cyprus's medieval and renaissance-era architecture. Although more diminutive than its more famous European counterparts, St Nicholas is the type of Gothic cathedral one might expect to find somewhere in France or Germany, except that it's a stone's throw from Syria and it has an Ottoman minaret attached to its north bell tower. Inside, all the ecclesiastical accoutrements were removed in 1571 when the Ottomans conquered the city: the altars, the floor tombs, the sculptures and paintings, and the stained glass. The south chapels were walled up and a *mihrab* was constructed, reorienting the focus of worship from the resplendent Gothic apse to the south wall, which faced Mecca. Carpets now cover the floors where once the tomb effigies of lords, noble ladies, and knights lay in stony *bas-relief*. Today, the structure still powerfully conveys the aesthetic of French Gothic, though it's made of a warmly-colored stone one would never find in Europe. Yet it is dissolving. Littering the roofs of the southern chapels, for example, are bits of Gothic tracery and finials that have fallen off the building. The once crisply detailed sculptural elements of the apse are pocked with both physical and chemical erosion: wind and rain and the salts from the sea air. Some stones are so pitted one can reach into the holes and take out handfuls of sand. Radially fractured, gaping holes still pock the walls, impact craters from cannon balls fired into it

during the 1571 siege. It's remarkable to see today the gaping fissures made four and a half centuries ago. It makes the history of the place preternaturally vivid. In every other city in Europe, such traces of a building's violent history would have been repaired, forever erasing its past.

There is little money in northern Cyprus to undertake large-scale architectural conservation projects like St Nicholas. Since the area is so little known there is very limited tourism and thus no compelling reason to invest heavily in the building's future. St Nicholas is a mosque, and is therefore not controlled by the state, or even the Department of Antiquities, but, rather, the *Evkaf* or religious foundation responsible for the mosque's upkeep. But this foundation's resources fall far short of what might be required for even a cursory evaluation of the building's structural and decorative elements. Nobody in northern Cyprus has either the technology or the expertise to make such an appraisal of St Nicholas, let alone execute a complex conservation campaign. Yet even if the money was forthcoming and the expertise available, the political impediments would far outweigh the economic ones. In fact, the European Community and numerous other organizations both governmental and non-governmental would be quite willing to provide money, technology and know-how to restore the building. However, like all the works of architecture and the archaeological sites in northern Cyprus, they are irretrievably entangled in the sticky web of the Island's contemporary politics.

Müge Şevketoğlu is a Turkish Cypriot archaeologist who is an expert on Neolithic Cyprus. Her principal excavation is of a small settlement near the village of Tatlisu—known to Greek Cypriots as Akanthou—on Cyprus's north coast. The inhabitants of the ancient village, which dates from around 8000 BCE, imported blade tools made of obsidian, a volcanic glass, which came from central Turkey. So many were discovered that Şevketoğlu thinks Tatlisu/Akanthou may have been a distribution hub. As a Turkish Cypriot archaeologist, Şevketoğlu is in a particularly sensitive situation. Since any excavation done in northern Cyprus does not have, and would never receive, permission from the officially recognized Department of Antiquities of the Republic of Cyprus (the parallel, unrecognized Department of Antiquities in Turkish Cyprus is only acknowledged by Turkey) her work is 'illegal', as is all the excavation work done by any archaeologists in north Cyprus. She is in the odd position of not being able to lawfully excavate in her own country, though she has all of the

professional qualifications to do so (she has a PhD in archeology from Edinburgh University). North Cypriot archaeologists have gotten around this problem by claiming that their excavations are 'salvage' operations, meant to save the site from imminent destruction from either natural or human processes. Such actions are sanctioned by the very official sounding 'Second Protocol of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.' Article 9 of the Protocol forbids 'any archaeological excavation ...*save where this is strictly required to safeguard, record or preserve cultural property*' [my italics]. It is this last clause that archaeologists working in Turkish Cyprus invoke to validate their digs. Even though no shots have been fired in forty years, northern Cyprus is still considered a 'conflict zone' and thus can be categorized under the Rules of Engagement of the Second Protocol.

One such contentious salvage excavation is the *Kral Tepesi* or King's Mountain near Kaleburnu (Gk. Galinoporni). In the spring of 2004 hikers climbed a rocky hill in the Karpas peninsula to get a view of the surrounding countryside. At the crest they found that rains had exposed something in the earth. Gazing into the hole, they saw the mouth of a large clay pot in which rested a number of metal vessels. Visible as these objects now were, local villagers would have had little trouble pilfering them to sell on the art market (clandestine digging for profit is a time-honored pastime, for Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike). Local authorities were contacted and twenty-six bronze objects, dating from around 1200 BCE, were freed from their confines. It had been several decades since such a large hoard of Bronze Age objects had been found in the Mediterranean. Not only was the site now prone to locals who might try to dig up artifacts, but the hilltop itself was eroding. Much of the western section of the hill, in fact, had already collapsed into a dramatic talus on the western slope. So there was ample justification for a salvage operation. Still, the excavations remain under the cloud of illegitimacy and archeologists who participated in the dig became *personae non gratae* in the archaeological world; one losing a job that had been promised him at Oxford university.

The fate of these rare bronzes is also a contentious issue. The archaeological authorities have neither the training nor the will to store these bronzes and safeguard them from decay. When I first saw the Kaleburnu bronzes in the spring of 2006 they were taken out of a huge, flimsy box that a television had come in. They were wrapped in scanty sheets of acidic newspaper. Most people would take greater care in packing

their dishes when making a cross-town move. As the employees of the Turkish Cypriot Department of Antiquities, who had been responsible for this decidedly un-archival packaging, took off the newspaper—with their bare hands, no less destructive in terms of acidic contamination—several spoonfuls of metal powder rained down. In the two short years since their discovery these invaluable treasures had deteriorated more than in the previous three-thousand two-hundred years underground, so carelessly had they been handled and stored.

In another case, not verifiable in all its details, an order to transport medieval tomb slabs from a church in Nicosia was apparently given by the Turkish Department of Antiquities in advance of some structural work that was to be done. Someone reckoned that a construction contractor would be just the person to move these weighty objects. However, the contractors, while well-supplied with trucks, strong workers, ropes, and all the paraphernalia required to move hefty things, also, the rumor goes, had jackhammers to facilitate just such work. It seems they rather misunderstood their assignment. To them, the fourteenth-century effigies of long-deceased Christians were of no greater value than a concrete sidewalk. As far as I know, no outside scholars have been able to ascertain the fate of these fragments of Cyprus's glorious Middle Ages.

The Turkish army, an ubiquitous presence in northern Cyprus—making it one of the world's most militarized regions—has a poor track record when it comes to cultural heritage. It was under their watch that numerous mosaics and frescoes in north Cypriot churches were stolen after 1974, along with dozens of painted icons only now being repatriated to the Republic of Cyprus. They have also occupied, to use as military bases, three ancient Cypriot Orthodox monasteries: St John Chrysostom, Saint Spyridon, and the Acheiropietos Monastery. Other churches were more recently occupied and damaged. Once, in 2005, while bulldozing an area at the tip of the Karpas peninsula to make a platform for a flagpole, in a typical display of unnecessary patriotic bluster, they destroyed part of an 8,000 year old Neolithic archaeological site. It was a well-documented site. A simple phone call would have averted the disaster.

It is certainly not, however, just Turkish Cypriots who are at fault. Greek Cypriots have also been guilty of subverting or obstructing attempts to improve the situation. If foreign money and experts were allowed unfettered access to northern Cyprus many of these sad incidents could be avoided. Yet the embargo, still aggressively supported by Greek Cyprus, is not only an economic embargo but a

cultural prohibition as well, and artistic heritage is held often for ransom. An illustrative case concerns one of northern Cyprus's most spectacular Gothic masterpieces, the Abbey of Bellapais, made famous by Lawrence Durrell's novel *Bitter Lemons*. The abbey has one of the most stunning medieval refectories in the world. This cavernous, rib-vaulted hall, where the monks ate their meals, has few rivals in Europe. The monastery is located on a dramatic slope, from which one obtains a spectacular view of the Karamanian Sea to the north. It was long known that one of the walls of the refectory was leaning out. In 2006 USAID audaciously began exploring the possibility of doing minor projects in northern Cyprus, including addressing cultural heritage problems. A group of structural analysts found the situation to be critical at Bellapais, and USAID offered to fund a two-million dollar campaign of conservation work. However, while the monastery and its refectory were in northern Cyprus, it still legally belonged to the Cypriot Orthodox Church. In keeping with international law, USAID had to ask permission of the Church to proceed with the project. The Bishop of Kyrenia (who has since been replaced), the ecclesiast in whose diocese Bellapais lay, refused to give the Americans permission. He is reported to have said, "Let it fall. I'd rather it fell down than I help the Turks". In other words, he'd rather a seven-century-old masterpiece of medieval architecture collapse in the next tremor than help Turkish Cypriots have even a modicum of a tourist industry. This is the situation across the board. The Greek Cypriots can block any attempts at work in the north as long as north Cyprus continues to be unrecognized as a state and as long as the Republic's institutions, such as the Church or the Government or Department of Antiquities, are the only recognized authoritative bodies governing cultural artifacts in the north.

The isolation of north Cyprus and the inexorable decay of its neglected architecture and archaeology are not just cultural issues, as if one can dismiss 'culture' or 'history' by focusing instead on the supposedly more virile and relevant 'politics.' The fate of these structures has real significance to people's lives and the ways they see themselves as individuals and members of a community or nation. In Cyprus, ordinary Greek Cypriot citizens are becoming completely alienated from their heritage in the north. In the spring of 2007 I went to visit one of Cyprus's most revered and ancient Orthodox churches, the Panagia Kanakaria in the small Karpasian village of Boltaşlı (Gk. Lythrangomi), parts of which date back to the 6th century. The famous mosaics from this church, which were stolen in 1974 and put on the international art market (see the two-part exposé in *The New Yorker* July 13 and 20, 1993), now reside in a

museum in Greek Cyprus. Usually, the doors of the church are locked—a classic instance of locking the barn door after the horse has fled—and one must get the key from a local official. This time the door was already open. I expected to see the rare sight of a tourist inside. Instead I found a crying woman. I went outside, leaving her alone with her grief. When she came out she smiled, her mascara streaking her cheeks, and said, “Thank you,” as I handed her a small packet of tissues from my backpack. “Are you from the Greek side?” I asked. “Yes,” she said, and began telling me her story.

She had been born in Lythrangomi in 1970, and one of her only memories was of an Easter celebration at the Kanakaria. She described the color, the music, the swags of colorful bunting and garlands, villagers in their best clothes, and the black-robed monks of the small monastery. The ancient mosaics were still in their place and the paintings of the iconostasis bright. Votive beeswax candles glowed reverently underneath them. The church smelled of incense, children played in the churchyard. Her own daughter, she said, would be four years old this Easter, the same age she had been when Turkey invaded and they were driven from the village, losing everything. That morning she had surreptitiously traversed the Green Line. She said that if her husband or anyone else in her family found out she’d crossed they would disown her (she’d used a fictitious doctor’s appointment for cover). She said she came here to see what memories she could find, to try to clarify for herself the story she might one day be able to tell her daughter. She wanted to see if it was possible to come here without the tragedy overwhelming her. She dreamed of showing her daughter the house that she was born in and the fields where she used to chase butterflies. That woman’s story forever altered my conception of that building. Now, I can’t visit that derelict shell without remembering her evocation of the place’s vitality forty years ago. I see her running in her Sunday dress in the summer of 1974 while military planes took off from Turkey, laden with paratroopers who would within hours make her a refugee in her own land. Somewhere in the south of Cyprus, Turkish Cypriot children were also playing in their yards. They, too, would be displaced and forced to relocate to the north in the subsequent population exchange.

In the meantime, Michael Walsh continues to organize modest conservation projects through his ever-increasing group of international supporters. In the summer of 2014 conservators will begin a campaign on the frescos in Famagusta’s fourteenth-

century Armenian church. The problem is that there are too many projects and too few devotees to the cause. In the end, Greek and Turkish Cypriots themselves have to work together to facilitate cultural heritage conservation and responsible archaeological excavation in the north. There are many reasons to be hopeful, especially where young Cypriots from both sides of the Green Line are cooperating in bi-communal events. Among the younger generation of both Greeks and Turkish Cypriots there is a movement to reject the ethnic hatred of the past and forge a new future. It's not just Facebook and Twitter détente. There is Danae Stylianou's recent documentary film *Sharing an Island* (2012) in which three Turkish and three Greek Cypriots share a house together for five days while taking road trips through all of Cyprus, rediscovering their common heritage and learning how to live together. The Orthodox Church of Cyprus is also attempting to facilitate programs to save the art and architecture of the north by establishing the Synodochal Committee for Monuments and Art, whose secretary is the Reverend Savvas Hadjionas, who I met in the Archbishop's Palace in Nicosia in September of 2013. A patient and friendly man who looks like he could also break you in two if he wanted, Reverend Hadjionas knows that more dialogue with the Turkish side is needed to save the monuments that are now so critically endangered. Dr. Ioannes Eliades, the Director of the Makarios Cultural Center Museum, has initiated an aggressive and successful campaign for the repatriation of icons and other works of art that were illegally sold on the art market after the 1974 invasion, one of these retrieved from the 1980s pop musician Boy George. Eliades' continued effort keeps the issue of cultural heritage at the forefront of Greek Cypriots' consciousness. For now, however, these reconciling voices are a small minority and the old forces of nationalism are still forcefully arrayed against them.

I've always thought that cherishing the things of the past was good practice for cherishing the future. The tangible remains of history—buildings, sculptures, paintings, artifacts—are singular existences, still preserved and present, as opposed to an event from the past recorded by the historian, which in a way is forever lost, only 'happening' again in pale, secondary retellings. Objects from history still maintain themselves more or less in the form they originally had. Their 'event' endures for us to bear witness to in the present and their survival under our care mirrors the general guardianship we have for the world and what we want to preserve of it for our children and people of the future whom we'll never know. Caring for both the natural and cultural environments are parallel and complementary activities. It's a way of respecting nature as well as

human nature, and valuing both at once clarifies our positions in the world and in time past, present, and future.

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