

The Lost Origins of Famagusta: the churches of the Greek quarter

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Uncertainty over the date of the demise of the former Byzantine capital of Salamis-Constantia (just three kilometers to the north) effectively prohibits us from accurately charting the beginning of urban life in Famagusta. The absence of any possible archaeological survey exacerbates the problem further. And so this paper aims to propose a comparative study of the still-existing churches and monasteries located in the so-called Greek quarter of the city. Through a detailed architectural and ichnographic comparison with other contemporary ecclesiastical buildings of the eastern Mediterranean, it seems possible to shed some light on the artistic and cultural influences experienced by the city in the period between the twelfth and fifteenth century and, therefore, draw a picture of the development of the urban fabric, topography, and monumental history of Famagusta. In fact, buildings like the domed cross-in-square church of Saint Symeon, the homonymous monastery and the fifteenth-century churches of Ayia Zone and Ayios Nicholas, attest the continuous vitality of an urban area, which (due to its closeness to the harbour) possibly acted as the first social, economical, political and, indeed, religious focus of settlement for the local population, and later remained a densely inhabited centre of the Orthodox devotion.