

THREE VAULTED BASILICAS IN CYPRUS

SIR GEORGE HILL, in his *History of Cyprus*, refers to a group of early churches in the Island in the following passage: 'It seems improbable that any important buildings can have been put up during the periods of the Arab raids, that is, from the middle of the eighth century to 965. Churches, for instance, like those at Aphendrika, which have been attributed on the one hand to the sixth or seventh century, on the other to the "Romanesque," would not have been built at a time when the population of places like Ayios Philon and Lambousa was moving inland to escape the raiders. Whether the earlier or the later date is to be preferred must be left to the specialists.'¹ In a footnote, he recorded my own opinion that the vaulted basilicas



FIG. 1.—APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS. FROM THE NORTH-WEST.

of the Aphendrika type should be dated after the Byzantine reconquest. The purpose of this article is to present some evidence in support of that opinion. It concerns three ruined churches, all in the village lands of Rizokarpaso: the Panayia and Asomatos churches at Aphendrika, the site, which Hogarth identified as Urania, near the north coast 5 miles north-east of the village,² and the Panayia at Sykha, some 6 miles south-west of the village, on the south side of the Karpas peninsula.

Hogarth referred to the Aphendrika churches as Byzantine. Enlart published the first plans and descriptions, treating all three churches as Romanesque constructions of the end of the twelfth century.³ Jeffery's descriptions follow Enlart's very closely, but he suggested that although these 'Romanesque' churches were designed in a Latin style of construction, there was no doubt that they were built for the use of the Orthodox church.⁴ Gunnis also followed Enlart.⁵ Soteriou has published useful photographs of the Aphendrika churches and a new plan of Asomatos, but classes them with the Early Christian monuments.⁶ In face

¹ Sir George Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, I (Cambridge, 1940), 322.

² D. G. Hogarth, *Devia Cypria* (London, 1889), 85.

³ C. Enlart, *L'Art Gothique et la Renaissance en Chypre*, I (Paris, 1899), 395-401.

⁴ G. Jeffery, *A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus* (Nicosia, 1918), 258-260.

⁵ R. Gunnis, *Historic Cyprus* (London, 1936), 167 and 414.

⁶ G. Soteriou, *Τὰ Παλαιοχριστιανικά καὶ Βυζαντινὰ Μνημεῖα τῆς Κύπρου* (Πρακτ. τῆς Ἀκαδ. Ἀθηνῶν, 1931), 8; *Τὰ Βυζαντινὰ Μνημεῖα τῆς Κύπρου*, Ἀ (Athens, 1935), Fig. 4 and Pls. 10a, 11a and 15a (Panayia); Fig. 5 and Pls. 11b and 12 (Asomatos).

of such a diversity of opinion it was clearly desirable to re-examine the buildings. An opportunity to do so was given me in the summer of 1946, when conservation of the Aphendrika

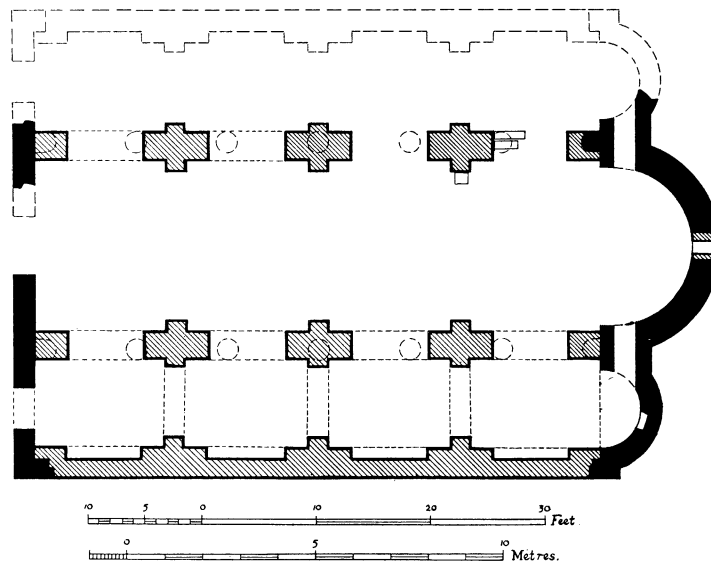


FIG. 2.—APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS. PLAN (Scale 1/200).



FIG. 3.—APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS.
THE SOUTH AISLE.



FIG. 4.—APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS. JUNCTION OF THE SOUTH ARCADE
WITH THE EAST WALL.

churches was started.⁷ The most significant observations then made are set out below together with new plans and some relevant photographs.

⁷ The work was of the nature of 'first aid' treatment and was carried out by the Cyprus Government Department of Antiquities, with the aid of contributions from the JHS.—VOL. LXVI.

neighbouring monastery of Apostolos Andreas and from the Cyprus Monuments Fund.

APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS

Of the three churches this is the best preserved. The south wall of the nave, which is of four bays, stands to its full height, the south aisle with its semicircular barrel-vault is complete (Fig. 3) and enough remains of the nave vaulting to show that it too was semicircular in form (Fig. 1). Massive piers in the nave arcades, internal blind arcading on the south wall, attached pilasters carrying transverse arches under the vaults and absence of any clerestory windows; these are its characteristic features. Examination of what is preserved of the east end shows that they are all secondary. The masonry of the apses is superior and set in much deeper courses. That of the nave arcade does not bond with it (Fig. 4), nor that of the south wall (the junction can be seen through the arch in Fig. 4). At the south-west angle of the church, the corner is formed in masonry of the same massive construction, within which has been set the lighter masonry closing the internal blind arcading and carrying the south aisle vault. At this point some of the masonry of the original angle has fallen away revealing that of the secondary construction built within it (Fig. 5).

In its present form, then, this church is a reconstruction with masonry vaults of an earlier building of similar dimensions. That this was not vaulted but followed the normal, wood-roofed type of Early Christian basilica, is evident from examination of the abutment of the remains of the north arcade on the east wall (Fig. 6). Here the masonry of the rectangular respond which carried the easternmost arch has fallen away, revealing a few drums of an attached half-column, bonded into the masonry of the apses. Where the south arcade meets the east wall the secondary masonry has survived, also at the abutment of both arcades on the west wall, concealing what remains of the corresponding half-columns. Between the east and west half-columns the original arcades were probably set in six intercolumniations of about 2.4 metres, as shown in the plan (Fig. 2). Such a system of supports, together with external walls 55 centimetres thick, could only have carried a wooden superstructure. The nave was doubtless roofed at a higher level than the aisles, to permit clerestory lighting.

The passages giving access from the central to the lateral apses belong to the original construction. A stone chancel post built into the south wall of the nave may have formed part of the screen enclosing the original sanctuary, the arrangement of which could probably be determined by excavation. A few stones, evidently *in situ*, among the debris of fallen vaulting suggest that in the reconstructed church the easternmost bay of the nave was enclosed.

APHENDRIKA, PANAYIA

The present church is a well-preserved building of sixteenth-century style covered with a pointed barrel-vault, occupying the three western bays of the nave of a vaulted basilica similar to, but larger than, the Asomatos church (Fig. 7). A large arch in the south wall, corresponding to the second arch of the earlier arcade, suggests that when the present church was built part of the south aisle was still intact and was retained as an aisle or chapel for the new church. Part of the original vaulting of this aisle is shown in Soteriou's photograph, but has now fallen; the south wall remains. Of the rest of the earlier church little has survived above ground level apart from a section of the apses at the east end. Here, as in the Asomatos church, the masonry is massive and is pierced by passages connecting the three apses. Here, too, some drums of the same half-column responds can be seen in this masonry, where the secondary construction of the nave arcades has fallen away. In the west wall also, part of the half-column which ended the original south arcade is visible (Fig. 8). Eastward from this stands a stone column dividing the westernmost arch of the secondary arcade (Fig. 9). Its distance from the half-column, measured centre to centre, is 2.75 metres. As a total of eight such intercolumniations would close on the half-column at the east end it is reasonable to assume that this column has survived *in situ* from the original colonnade.

The south wall consists of two parts: an outer thickness, now much decayed and leaning



FIG. 5.—APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS. THE SOUTH-WEST CORNER.



FIG. 6.—APHENDRIKA, ASOMATOS. EAST HALF-COLUMN OF NORTH COLONNADE.

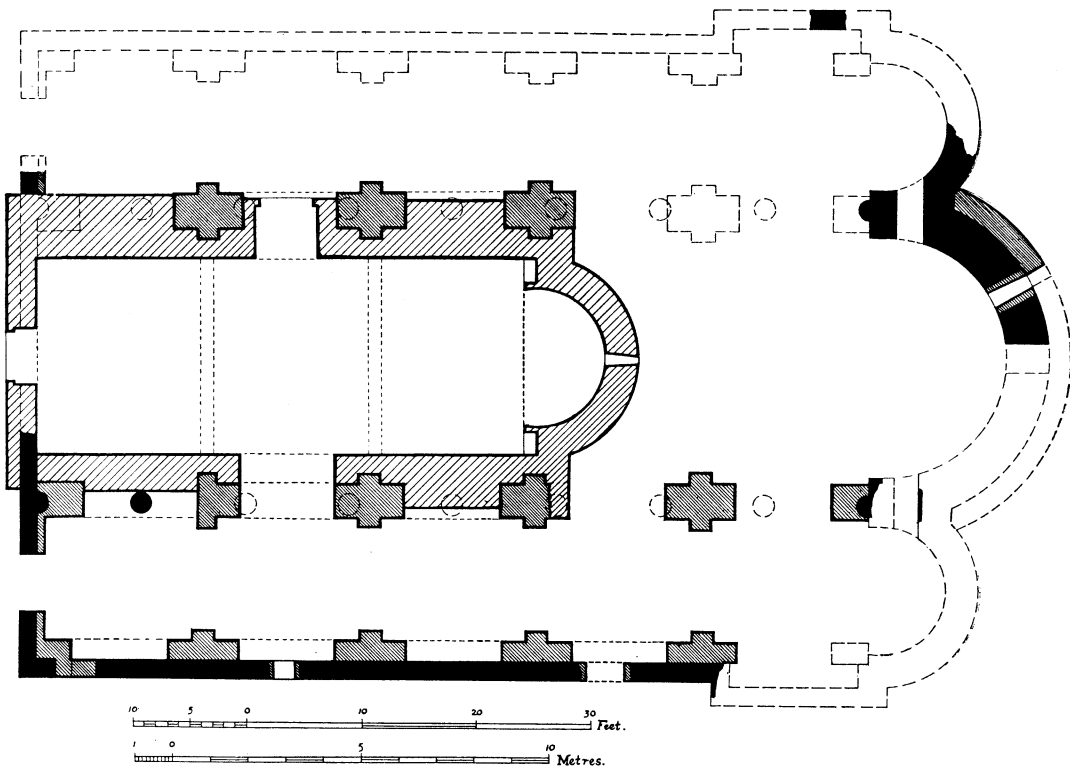


FIG. 7.—APHENDRIKA, PANAYA. PLAN (scale 1/200).

outwards (Fig. 10), and the blind arcade built against its inside face to carry the vault of the south aisle. The former is built in deep courses of slab construction, twin 'stretchers' alternating with 'headers,' similar to the masonry of the apses. This then is the outer wall of the original columnar basilica; being no more than 51 centimetres thick it can only have supported a wooden roof.⁸ The eastern part of the south wall has not survived above ground level, consequently the arrangement of the east end of the original basilica and of its sanctuary cannot be determined without excavation. Even the limits of the building suggested on the plan are by no means certain.

When the church was reconstructed as a vaulted basilica it was divided into five bays. In the three western bays the nave wall on the south side has survived, rising above the vault of the sixteenth-century church.⁹ Here, as in the Asomatos church, there were no clerestory windows. At the east end, however, the treatment appears to have been different; for above the south-east angle of the sixteenth-century church the curvature of the nave vault is not continued on the south wall, which from this point eastwards, so far as it is preserved, shows a vertical face on both sides. There is nothing at this point, nor in the plan, to suggest that the eastern bays of the nave of the otherwise vaulted basilica were covered by a dome. The unexpected change in the vaulting could, however, be explained if the second bay of the nave from the east had been raised to a higher level and covered with a transverse barrel-vault. This would have enabled windows to be opened in the vertical walls forming the north and south gables of the transverse vault, admitting light to an otherwise excessively dark interior. Excavation outside the apse of the third church might throw light on this problematical feature of the second.

SYKHA, PANAYIA

This is the smallest of the three churches, having in its present form only three bays; but it has a narthex, a feature absent in the others (Fig. 12). Other differences are the lack of internal blind arcading on the north and south walls and the use in the aisles of corbels to carry the transverse arches (Fig. 11). However, its general character is similar, though its construction is inferior. Like the other two churches, it is a reconstruction with stone vaults of a wood-roofed, columnar basilica. Of the latter the west wall and the lower parts of the apses have survived. Between the apses some drums of the half-columns which ended the colonnades are preserved (Fig. 14), and the corresponding western half-columns are plainly visible. Five intercolumniations of 2.45 metres would close the colonnades, as indicated on the plan. Further details of the first basilica were disclosed about fifteen years ago, when in a period of drought the cultivators of the neighbourhood cleared the debris from the interior, to appease the Panayia, and summoned a priest to pray there for rain. The floor of the reconstructed church was reached and broken through, revealing parts of the original pavement about 30 centimetres below it. In the central apse a simple synthronon was laid bare.¹⁰ In the course of the same clearance works fragments of a marble ambon and of chancel panels came to light (Fig. 13). This church lacks the passages communicating from the central to the lateral apses. On the south side there are traces of a second aisle or chapel with apsidal east end, evidently of the first period.

When the building was reconstructed as a vaulted basilica the north and south walls were entirely rebuilt, almost double the original thickness. The internal blind arcading, lacking on these walls, recurs in the narthex added outside the west wall, evidently at the time of reconstruction. This is in three parts following the standard Middle-Byzantine form: barrel-vaults running north-south covering the two lateral divisions (much of the northern vault is preserved) with a third, at a higher level, running east-west over the central part. Some traces

⁸ In the recent conservation works the damaged outer thickness of the south wall was rebuilt plumb to support the mass of masonry abutting on it.

⁹ Soteriou, Βυζ. Μνημ., Pl. 15a.

¹⁰ Clearance was limited to the interior; what is left of the external faces of the apses remains concealed in debris, consequently the thickness of their masonry could not be measured (Fig. 12).

of paintings have survived on the reconstructed north wall and on some of the piers, too meagre to give any indication of their date.



FIG. 8.—APHENDRIKA, PANAYIA. WEST HALF-COLUMN OF SOUTH COLONNADE.



FIG. 9.—APHENDRIKA, PANAYIA. COLUMN OF SOUTH COLONNADE REMAINING *in situ*.



FIG. 10.—APHENDRIKA, PANAYIA. MASONRY OF THE ORIGINAL SOUTH WALL (FOREGROUND).



FIG. 11.—SYKHA, PANAYIA. THE SOUTH AISLE.

DISCUSSION

The divergence of view shown in previous references to these churches is explained by failure to appreciate that the existing remains belong, in all three cases, to two building periods. The plans so far published represent both the surviving parts of the columnar basilicas and the masonry supporting the stone vaults, with which they were later re-roofed, as parts of a single homogeneous construction. Having established the existence of two building periods, it remains to consider when the original basilicas were built and when they were repaired and vaulted.

The clearest indication of the date of original construction is given by the fragments of ambons and other marble fittings from the Panayia at Aphendrika¹¹ and the Sykha church (Fig. 13). These are of sixth-century style. A date in that century would be reasonable for the construction of the buildings they adorned; for wood-roofed basilicas of the same general type, with three aisles each terminating in an apse at the east end, are found well-distributed in Palestine before 600. No doubt the three churches remained in use in approximately their original form until the Arab raids obliged the inhabitants of the coastal settlements which they served to withdraw to the relative security of the hinterland. The churches must then have fallen into disuse and ruin, if they were not actually burnt by the invaders. At the time of their repair, an incomplete and damaged shell seems to have been all that remained in each case. There is no indication how long the period of abandonment was, except that it was long enough for the building technique employed on the original basilicas to have been forgotten and to have been replaced by a distinctive vaulted architecture.

It is not possible to fix the date of reconstruction by comparison with other vaulted basilicas in Cyprus. The only common type is the simple barrel-vaulted cell, which after the Byzantine reconquest was used over a long period where the builders could not aspire to the larger and more ambitious domical types.¹² These vary little and it is difficult to distinguish early from later examples. There is only one other comparable example of a vaulted, three-aisled basilica known to me: the church of Panayia Kanakaria at Lythrangomi, in its intermediate state.¹³ This differs from the Aphendrika churches in that a much smaller size of arch is used for the nave arcades and in having clerestory windows. The date of its construction is unknown, though study of the traces of painting surviving on the arcades may elucidate it. At present this church can throw little light on our problem.

The divergence of our three churches from the standard Byzantine types adopted in the Island during the eleventh and twelfth centuries is their most striking characteristic. On the other hand, they echo very closely the tradition of vaulted basilican building which was established in south-east Asia Minor from the fifth century, and there survived the importation of Byzantine types to influence the architecture of Cilicia under the kings of Lesser Armenia. The location of the few Cypriot examples in that part of the Island which lies opposite the Cilician coast can hardly be fortuitous.

The close of the twelfth century, which saw the establishment of the Lusignan kingdom, can safely be accepted as the *terminus ante quem* for our basilicas; for none of them bears any of those western features which later Orthodox churches in the Island borrowed from the Gothic style introduced by the Latins. Before that date, they could plausibly be assigned to any one of three periods: one of the peaceful intervals in the struggle between the Arabs and the Byzantines for the possession of the Island; the period of reconstruction following the final Byzantine reconquest in 965; and, thirdly, the early twelfth century, when connexions between Cyprus on the one hand and Cilicia and the Greek outposts in Syria on the other were particularly close, these being the sole surviving Imperial possessions in the East. Excavation might disclose details of the three churches, notably the arrangement and furniture of their sanctuaries, indicating clearly during which of these periods they were reconstructed. On the present evidence, for the reasons set out below, the period following the Byzantine recovery seems to be the most likely.

In favour of the earliest of the three alternatives there is the negative consideration that the basilicas are not at home among the many churches built between the Byzantine reconquest and the occupation by Richard Lionheart, for of these all the larger examples are domed.

¹¹ Soteriou, *op. cit.*, Pl. 13a.

¹² A good example in the same neighbourhood is Ayios Philon at Agridhia (Soteriou, *op. cit.*, Fig. 29).

¹³ That is, before the construction of the later central dome, the vaults east and west of it and the added supports built against the earlier arcades to carry them (Soteriou *op. cit.*, Fig. 20). In this intermediate state it was, I

believe, a reconstruction of an early columnar basilica, of which the main apse has been incorporated in the present building and to which the columns and capitals used in the south porch doubtless belonged. Some interesting features of the intermediate period were disclosed by the removal of plaster carried out in conjunction with repairs in 1941, under the direction of Mr. Th. Mogabgab.

Even where they were built on the remains of earlier basilicas domical types were followed: e.g., Ayios Philon on the site of Carpasia,¹⁴ and Panayia Akheiropiitos at Lambousa, where the central apse had survived intact.¹⁵ It might be supposed that at an earlier date, in one of the

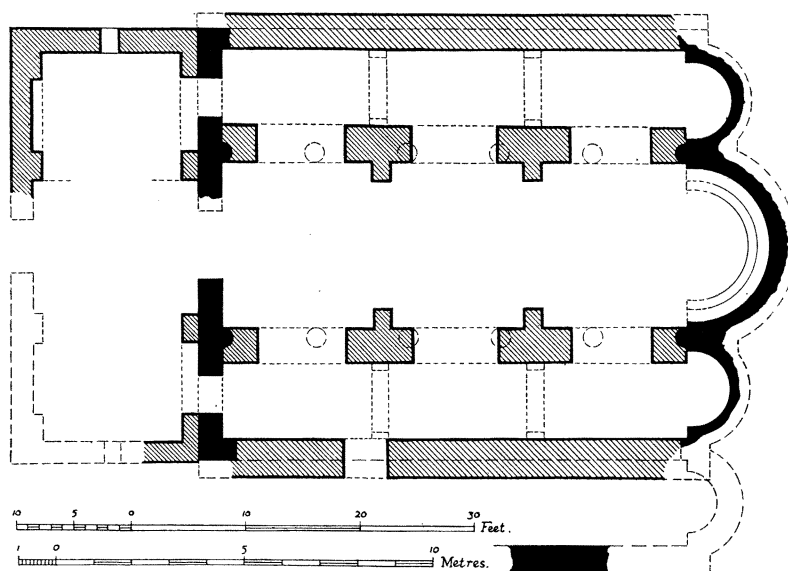


FIG. 12.—SYKHA, PANAYIA. PLAN (scale 1/200).

intervals in the struggle for the Island, church-builders would have been less influenced by Byzantine examples, and, conforming with an eastern basilican tradition, have produced churches of the Aphenfrika type. On the other hand, the re-occupation of the Aphenfrika



FIG. 13.—SYKHA, PANAYIA. MARBLE FRAGMENTS OF AMBON AND CHANCEL SCREEN.



FIG. 14.—SYKHA, PANAYIA. EAST HALF-COLUMN OF NORTH COLONNADE.

site attested by the churches was evidently on a large scale; for apart from the two large churches here described there are visible remains of three smaller, evidently contemporary. It is to be doubted whether re-settlement on so large a scale would have been attempted while Cyprus lay 'betwixt Greeks and Saracens.' Indeed, as no monuments elsewhere in the

¹⁴ Soteriou, *op. cit.*, Fig. 6; for the earlier remains, *Report of the Dept. of Antiquities, Cyprus*, 1935, 14 ff.

¹⁵ Soteriou, *op. cit.*, Fig. 15.

Island have been identified as dating from this period it would be imprudent to assign our churches to it.

As to the early twelfth century, notwithstanding the well-attested connexion between Cyprus and the Cilician province, it is clear that in matters ecclesiastic the Island drew inspiration predominantly from Byzantium itself. There is the evidence of the Imperial monastic foundations and, in the strictly architectural field, the introduction of brick construction contrasting with the traditional stone building of the Island. Byzantine brickwork penetrated, evidently at this time, to the neighbourhood of our churches, where it is used on a small scale in the little church of *Ayia Mavra* at *Rizokarpaso*. It would be questionable to attribute the three reconstructed basilicas, which are lacking in developed Byzantine characteristics, to a period when Byzantine influence must have been at its strongest.

It is preferable to assign them to the years following the Byzantine recovery of the Island: the end of the tenth century. At that time one might expect the older basilican form to have been retained, side by side with the domical Byzantine church types then being introduced for the first time. That they date from the time when the first domes were being built is suggested by features of the small domed church of *Ayios Georghios* at *Aphendrika*, similar in masonry and in some structural details to the vaulted basilicas which it adjoins.¹⁶ The dome is carried on transverse arches, a feature used in the basilicas also, but omitted in later domed churches. The drum of the dome is far from circular in plan and would be better described as square with rounded corners. The pendentives have the curved exterior backings found in the earlier Cypriot domes, which in later examples were filled out to form a square base to the drum as in Byzantine prototypes. Thus there are grounds for considering the reconstruction of the basilicas as approximately contemporary with the building of a church that must be placed early in the domed series, that is to say, soon after 965.

Why, it may be objected, were these three churches rebuilt as basilicas, while on the remains of other early columnar basilicas domical churches were erected following the Byzantine reconquest? The explanation probably lies in the extent to which the fabric of the original buildings had survived. If we may judge by what now remains incorporated in the present building, it would seem that of the original basilica of *Ayios Philon* at *Carpasia*, for example, only the lowest courses of the masonry survived at the time of reconstruction; consequently, a church of the then popular domed type was erected, without much regard for the earlier remains. In the three cases here described, however, practically the whole shell of the original structure seems to have remained. Rather than demolish sound masonry to make way for a domed building, a type of construction then but imperfectly understood if we may judge from *Ayios Georghios*, it was probably preferred to reconstruct the derelict basilicas in their original form, or as close to it as available materials and contemporary methods of construction permitted. That these methods of construction reflect a mainland rather than a Cypriot tradition might be explained by an accession of new population from the opposite coast of Cilicia to the *Karpas* peninsula after the Byzantine reconquest of the Island, impoverished and depopulated during three centuries of Arab depredations.

A. H. S. MEGAW.

¹⁶ Soteriou, Fig. 7 and Pl. 13*b*.