

Troodos (Cyprus)

No 351bis

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Painted churches in the Troodos region: Palaichori, Church of Ayia Sotira (Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour) – extension
<i>Location</i>	Troodos Region, Nicosia District
<i>State party</i>	Cyprus
<i>Date</i>	3 July 2000

Justification by State Party

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour (Ayia Sotira) in Palaichori belongs to the architectural type of the steep-pitched wooden roof with flat hooked tiles. This type of roofing over a Byzantine church is not found elsewhere, making the wooden-roofed churches of Cyprus a unique group example of religious architecture.

The wall paintings decorating the walls of the church are also of universal importance, dating back to the 16th century. **Criteria i, ii, iii, iv, and vi**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

History and Description

History

Although the last line of the inscription indicating the date of construction and decoration of the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour (Ayia Sotira) has been erased, research by specialists has enabled it to be dated to the beginning of the 16th century. As regards the wall paintings that decorate the interior of the church, comparative iconographic and stylistic studies with other churches in the region (Churches of the Holy Cross at Agiasmatai, 1494; St Mamas at Louveras, 1495; St Sozomenus, 1513; the Archangel-Panagia Theotokos at Galata, 1514), have dated them to the second decade of the 16th century. At the beginning of the 17th century, a surrounding wall was built on the southern and western sides of the edifice.

Description

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour is a type of construction that is characteristic of the mountainous region of Troodos. It is a small building, rectangular in plan and with a small eastern apse, covered with a shingle roof. Niches have been cut into the side walls.

The church is particularly notable for its very rich wall paintings. On the side walls the paintings are arranged in two rows, while the western wall has three rows plus the gable. The New Testament scenes are arranged on the upper level and the large figures of saints decorate the lower part of the walls.

The New Testament cycle opens with the Annunciation on the eastern wall and continues on the western gable with the Crucifixion before ending with the Descent of the Holy Spirit on the north side.

Several New Testament scenes show the existence of relations between the painting of Cyprus and that of the Christian art of the West from a stylistic and iconographic viewpoint. In the Crucifixion, although the representation of the thieves harks back to the beginning of Byzantine art, some details recall western art. For the Resurrection, the painter uses the western iconography showing Christ emerging from the tomb and the three sleeping soldiers in the foreground. The architectural decoration in the background of several scenes, including the Meal at the House of Abraham reflects a certain Italian influence.

The apse houses the representation of the Last Supper, one of the masterly compositions of the church. Christ appears twice behind the table: on the left he gives bread to the twelve Apostles, and on the right he gives wine, a scene from which Judas is excluded. Although the treatment of the draperies of the figures recalls that of 14th century painters, the unusual treatment of the faces with its diffused lighting effect lends a certain degree of emotion to the scene as a whole. In the Last Supper, the Apostles are usually arranged in two groups of six on either side of Christ, and in Cyprus only two paintings survive in which the twelve Apostles are shown twice, of which this is one. The other is in the Church of St Nicholas at Galataria, which is not in the group of churches already inscribed in the World Heritage List.

The scene of the *Thisia* (Sacrifice) is unusual in that it shows the Christ Child both in the paten and in the chalice under the silk veil supported by two angels. In Byzantine art, the Christ Child usually only appears in one of the two sacred vessels.

The specific style of the wall paintings of the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, which places it at the boundaries of the 16th century Cretan school of painting, as already indicated in case of the Last Supper, emerges more markedly in the figures of the saints in the lower row on the walls. Already at this point, however, the Virgin Mary in the apse vault is portrayed with greater simplicity, particularly as regards the treatment of her vestments, in which the complex and emphasized folds have been abandoned by comparison with paintings of the same subject in other churches in the Troodos region at the end of the 15th century (eg the Church of the Archangel Michael at Pedoulas, 1474). What is most innovative, however, is the treatment of the Virgin's face, where the lighting is emphasized by delicate lines of white paint which radiate so as to create an expression of joy.

The faces of the saints in the lower rows in the church, such as those of St Anthony and St Andrew, are treated with great variety, as though they were portraits, using many white painted highlights.

Management and conservation

Legal status

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour is the property of the Church of Cyprus and the local Church Committee. Although private property, the church proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage List is listed as an Ancient Monument (N2/40) and protected under the provisions of the basic 1931 Law on Antiquities. This law states that any intervention requires approval by the competent authorities (Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Communication and Public Works). Severe penalties are imposed in the event of violation of the law.

Furthermore, the law stipulates that listed monuments must be surrounded by a zone in which the height and architectural style of any new construction is subject to control. The Department of Antiquities and the local authorities have already demolished a recent building in the vicinity of the church.

Management

The management of the nominated property proposed for inclusion is the responsibility of the Department of Antiquities of the Ministry of Communication and Public Works, in conjunction with the Church of Cyprus and the local Church Committee. The Department of Antiquities is responsible for repair work on the church and the preservation of the wall paintings.

Conservation and authenticity

Conservation history

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour has been in the care of the Department of Antiquities since 1935. Structural work has been carried out by the Department in conjunction with the competent religious authorities. Starting in 1963 specialists from the Department cleaned the paintings and undertook their conservation. Since that time other interventions have been carried out when they became necessary.

The church is currently in a good state of conservation. However, protective measures should be taken to cope with the increase in the number of visitors.

The improvement of the immediate environs of the church is covered by a Landscape Plan that is currently being prepared. This includes the development of an information centre, sanitary services, and signs for visitors. Implementation of the Plan will be the responsibility of the Department of Antiquities, the local Church Committee, the Church of Cyprus, and the local authorities.

The church has retained its original use as a place of worship and, although the number of visitors is not very large, protective measures should be taken to cope with an eventual increase.

Authenticity

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour meets the criterion of authenticity in its design, materials, execution, and function. Works needed for conservation of the structure and wall paintings have in no way affected the authenticity of the monument.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission from ICOMOS visited Cyprus in April 2001.

Characteristics

The remarkable post-Byzantine wall paintings of the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour (Ayia Sotira) at Palaichori form a complete cycle of paintings from the second decade of the 16th century. They embody an iconography, style, and technique which stem from various sources and foreshadow, in certain of their characteristics, the 16th century Cretan school of painting. Through its architecture and its decoration this church forms a whole and completes the set of nine painted churches in the Troodos region already included in the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria ii, iii, and iv.

Comparative analysis

The specialists consulted by ICOMOS about this proposal for an extension of the painted churches of the region of Troodos have confirmed that in the region there is no other church from the start of the 16th century which is comparable with the Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour at Palaichori.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

Whilst the quality of this church is undeniable, making it suitable for addition to the existing inscribed group of churches, ICOMOS feels that the State Party should be requested to complete the evaluation of all the other churches of this type and period in the Troodos region and resubmit it as a final extension with others that it considers to be worthy of inscription.

At its meeting in June 2001 the Bureau adopted the recommendation of ICOMOS. On 29 October the State Party reported to UNESCO that "At this stage, there is no intention to submit other extensions of this site in the future. However, if subsequently it was decided to modify this intention, an eventual new submission will be accompanied by a comparative study."

In the opinion of ICOMOS this is a somewhat equivocal response, since the State Party is keeping open the possibility of additional extensions. It feels that the State Party should undertake the proposed comparative study of all the churches in the Troodos region forthwith, so as to provide a firm intellectual and practical basis for a single multiple extension (of which the Church of the Transfiguration would doubtless form part).

ICOMOS Recommendation

That further consideration of this proposal for extension be *deferred* to await the completion of a full evaluation of all the Troodos churches and the identification of a definitive group of churches for nomination as extensions to the existing inscribed property.

Bureau Recommendation

That this nomination be *referred back* to the State Party, asking whether they wish to submit other extensions of this site in the future. In that eventuality, the State Party will be encouraged to provide a comparative study.

ICOMOS, November 2001