

# The Development and Transformation of the City of Famagusta Inner-city in Cyprus

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*Mediterranean; Cyprus; Famagusta; inner-castle; transformation*

The aim of the study is to research the development and transformation of this city, which has gathered a dense architectural heritage throughout the centuries, due to the coincidence of sovereignties and influences of different nations with different cultural and social accumulation.

The selected topic of this research is *The Development and Transformation of the City of Famagusta Inner city – intra-muros – in Cyprus*, a city whose history of settlement reaches far back to Arsinoe, a city founded by Egyptian king Ptolomy Philadelphus around 285–247 BC. However, Famagusta had a strong population increase after 648 AD as a result of the Arabic invasions to the nearby ancient city of Salamis, a few miles to the north.

## Establishment of the City

As a port city on an island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, it had an anonymous cultural and architectural assortment, and this makes it a peculiar city. Different cultures coincide on each other and form a distinctive city context with its urban spatial characteristics and monuments.

There are two different assertions about the city's name 'Famagusta'. Its actual name is thought to be the a corruption of the Greek word 'Ammochostos', which means buried in the sand, from the sandy soil which surrounds it (Mariti 1971, 62). The other statement is that it was renamed as Fama Augusti by the victor, Augustus, in his own honour, after the battle of Actium (Brassey 1880, 284). Its name is written as Famagosta (Iacoma Franco, 1570), Famagusta que olim Tamassus (Abraham Or-

telius, 1573; Mercator-Hondius, 1606; William Blaeu, 1653), Famagusta que olim Salamis (Nicolas Sanson-P. Mariette, 1667; Valek and Schenk, 1680), Famagosta, Famagusta, Fama-Augusta, Tamassus, Tamasa, Amamassus, Tamesia, Temesen (Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, 1696) in various ancient maps (Stylianou 1971, 20–21). And it is called 'Magusa' by its present inhabitants.

## The Golden Age of the City as the Most Flourishing Centre of Oriental Trade

Ammochostos first begins to be of importance at the time of the Third Crusade. However, its fortune must have been changed almost overnight when Acre and the seaports of Syria fell to the Saracens in 1291 (Hill 1972, 14). King Henry II of Cyprus was far-sighted enough to offer the displaced Christian merchants of the Levant this obscure town in which to continue their uninterrupted trade. Over the next hundred years Famagusta became the most important Christian city of the East, excepting only Constantinople (Burch 1990, 85). Famagusta has lived its richest and most populated period under the Lusignan Sovereign (1192–1374) especially after the fall of Acre. The city was a shelter during this period for many refugees, with its very protective castle and the most flourishing centre of Oriental trade. In his notes on Cyprus from the *De Terra Sancta et itinere Ihierosol, Ludolf* (printed in the fifteenth century, without note of date or place, Strasbourg, 1468?), priest of the church of Suchen in Westphalia, wrote (Cobham 1969, 19–20): "In Famagusta, there are the harbours of all the

sea and realm and concourse of merchants and pilgrims. It 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 florins".

## The Decline of the Trade in the City

However, the city could not preserve its superiority in the Mediterranean trade after passing entirely into the hands of the Genoese with a treaty signed at Nicosia in the royal palace on October 21, 1374 (Hill 1972, 415).

Indeed the quarrels between Genoese and Lusignan parties, piracy, the riot in 1331 and attacks of the Genoese after 1363 caused decay in the city and a recession in the trade and economy of the city. Better advantages for merchants granted by the Lusignan authorities in Larnaca (a port city on the south) were another cause of the decline in trade (Çiçek 2001, 243). Martoni from Carinola near Calvi in Campania, who arrived at Famagusta on November 27, 1394 wrote that "a great part, almost a third of the city is uninhabited, and the houses are destroyed, and this has been done since the date of the Genoese lordship" (Cobham 1969, 22).

The Venetian occupation was entirely military in character, and all the care of former regimes for the commerce and agriculture of the island disappeared. Financially and culturally the island fell into a sad decline (Spyridakis 1964, 53).

Another evaluation about the period after the Genoese reign is by Robert Francis "It fell into the hands of Genoese in 1374, owing to a dispute with Venice over the precedence of their envoys at the coronation ceremonies of Peter II. From that year its importance declined, as the city was not finally restored to the crown of Cyprus until ninety years later. Isolated from the rest of the island, Famagusta never recovered its previous prosperity, and during the sixteenth century was mainly important as a fortress" (Francis 1949, 39).

## The Sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire in Famagusta

After the conquest of the island, with the Muslim population brought from Anatolia and Syria, an important increase in Muslim population of the city occurred and the ethnic pattern of the city was changed. However, the administrative registrations only mentions the taxpayers and do not give reliable numbers (Çiçek 2001, 244). Drought, locusts and earthquakes with consequent famine and plague in the first 100 years of the Ottoman reign greatly reduced the population of the city. Some measure of relief was given in 1660, but in the 18th century a repetition of these calamities reduced the population by two thirds (Mangoian 1946, 11).

According to tax registrations from 1572, the population in Famagusta, which numbered about 1700 people, paid one third times more tax than the population of Nicosia. The taxed productions were fishing, trade, custom taxation and services, madder production, leather production, wine production and sales (Çiçek 2001, 245). Heyman who published his book in 1759 as 'Travels through part of Europe', mentioned Famagusta as the only good harbour on the whole island: it is spacious and semicircular, the air however is unhealthy. The town is chiefly inhabited by Turkish soldiery (Cobham 1969, 32).

It can be understood from the writings of pilgrims that that the city and the port was mostly used for military purposes as it was before it came under Genoese and Venetian Reigns (fig. 1).

## The British Rule in Famagusta

Two important works occurred during the reign of British authority in Cyprus between 1878 and 1960. One is that the moat was pumped dry and planted. So everlasting plagues incepted from the moats were brought to an end (Stewart 1908, 57).

The other is the new port, completed in 1906. An inner basin was dredged over an area of 900 feet by 600 feet to 24 feet at low water, with a channel of approach 250 feet wide and 26 feet deep.

Othello (citadel) was pierced with three arches, giving access from the town to a new quay,

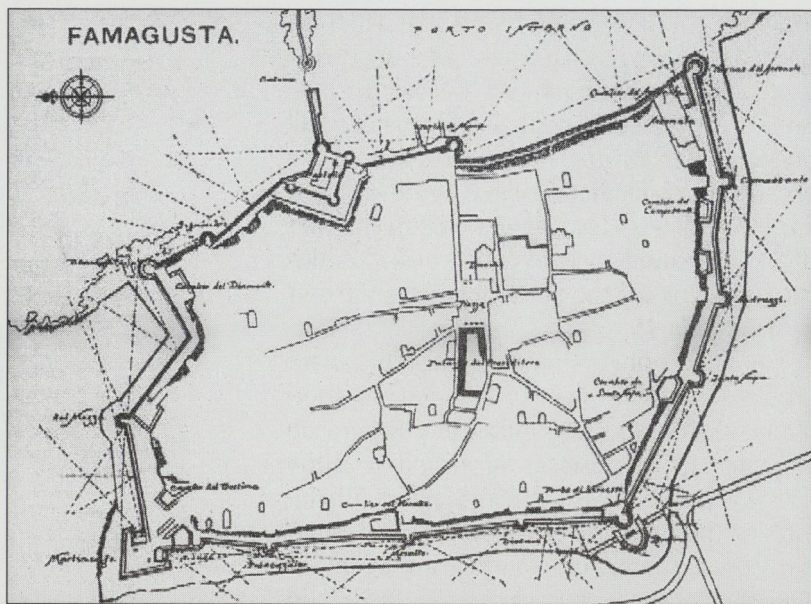


Fig. 1: Famagusta in 16th century (Jeffrey 1983, 144).

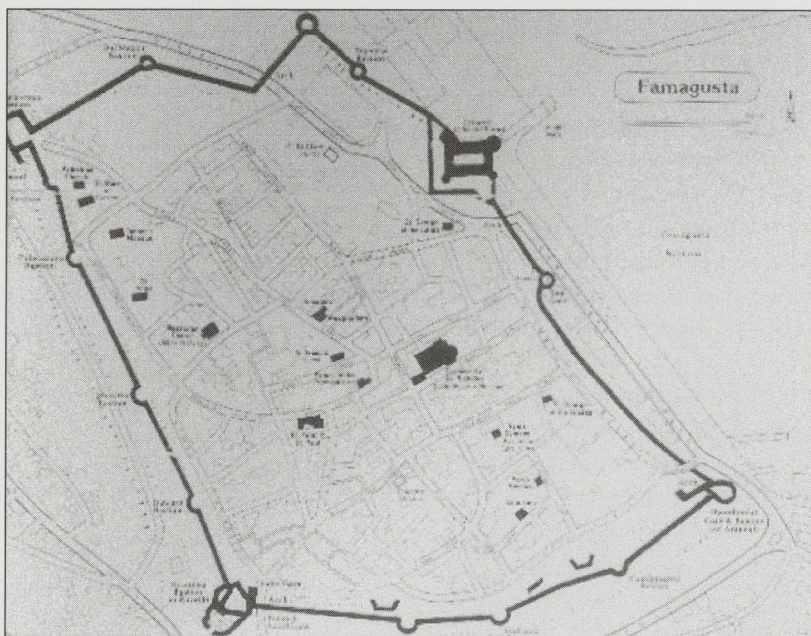


Fig. 2: The city in 20th century (Enlart 1987, revised edition).

which is faced with a concrete wall 900 feet long in 24 feet of water. An additional basin, 450 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 15 feet deep at low water, with a jetty 300 feet long was completed (Green 1914, 87) (fig. 2).

Another important change in the city was the additional two openings that were made on the city walls in addition to the existing Sea Gate (Porta del mare) and Land Gate (Porta di Limisso).

The new harbour and the gates of the city certainly caused an economic improvement in the city concerning the development of city

trade. However, in today's view we may say that the new port has completely changed the effect of the city walls from the seaside. The relation of the city may be settled in a better way by placing the recreational facilities along the sea walls and placing the porta far away from the city centre. The connection of the citizens of Famagusta with the sea is completely removed, for the shore of Varoshia (suburb of Famagusta) has been closed since the war in 1974 and the port covers a long coastline of the city. They live along, but away from the sea.

### The Monuments and Urban Transformations in Famagusta

The city has very important monuments including very well preserved city walls (fig. 3). The fortifications of Famagusta were first built by Lusignan Kings about A.D. 1300, and seventy-three years later – under the reign of Pierre II – were taken by assault by the Genoese, not to be restored to its former dimensions until nearly a hundred years later in 1464 (Stewart 1908, 55).

In his book *Chorografia*, Bologna, 1573, Etienne de Lusignan wrote that “Famagusta was fortified by the Lusignan kings, and then by the Genoese, who held it for ninety years. Then the bastard king, and lastly the Venetians, added to its buildings. It is founded on the live rock, and can not be undermined. The walls are massive built of live stone, and so broad that two carts can travel on them” (Cobham 1969, 16).

Truly, all the pilgrims visiting the city, commented on the firmness and thickness of the fortifications. For example, Martoni mentioned about the city walls in his writings: “The said city has finer walls than I have seen in any town, high with broad alleys round them, and many and high towers all around” (Cobham 1969, 23). An English pilgrim – Basil Stewart – in his book published in 1908, wrote on the fortifications that “The walls round Famagusta are very massively built of solid stone, carefully squared and very finely jointed. I estimated their thickness at about eighteen to twenty feet from the parapet of the walls, thus forming a moat, the bottom of which is about fifty feet from the parapet of the walls” (Stewart 1908, 57).

Most of the monumental buildings have been built during the reign of the Lusignan dynasty and within the liveliest days of trade. The foundations of Palazzo del Proveditore (fig. 2), Citadel of Othello, many churches of different communities like Latins, Greeks, Armenians, Nestorians, Franciscans, Greeks, Templars and Hospitalliers are the other monuments of the period being very interesting examples of Gothic style in the East. These monuments are the evidences of the social and economical aspects of Mediterranean life in the era.

Palazzo del Proveditore (Venetian Palace), opposite the cathedral and across the square, was first built by Lusignans, however nothing now remains of the Royal Palace in which the kings of Cyprus lodged until the reign of Peter II in 1369. The present façade is completely Venetian and is a magnificent piece of architecture, consisting of three arches and supported by four grand columns from Salamis. The arms of Giovanni Renier, Captain of Cyprus in 1552, appear above the central arch (fig. 4). The other two columns of Salamis are placed on the opposite side of the palace (Gunnis 1973, 95).

The Citadel of Othello was originally a building of the fourteenth century with four round towers at the corners and was once surrounded by a moat. On the first bastion is a large marble lion of St. Mark. The main entrance has the winged lion of the Republic over it and the name of the Venetian Captain – Nicolo Foscarini – who remodelled the citadel and removed the upper floor in 1492. This is the so-called 'Othello Tower'. Shakespeare only mentions 'a seaport in Cyprus' but the citadel is always pointed out as the scene of the tragedy (Gunnis 1973, 90).

The church known as St. George of the Latins was probably erected after the visit of St. Louis to the city in 1248 (Francis 1949, 39), it bears evidence of crenellation, as at that time the city wall had not yet been built (Francis 1949, 39). It is known to be the earliest example of Gothic architecture in the city and used to be called St. Catherine until the identification of Camille Enlart (Enlart 1987, 258) from Stefano Gibellino's drawing of 1571 (the oldest drawing of the city). The other great churches; St. Francis (probably founded by Henry II 1284–1324), Carmelite Church (main building probably dates from the middle of the fourteenth century), Cathedral of St. Nicholas

(founded in 1211, rebuilt on a grander scale 1326 – probably middle of the century, being used as Lala Mustapha Pasha Mosque since 1571) and St. George of the Greeks are all built under Lusignan reign except for the church of SS. Peter and Paul (used as Sinan Pasha mosque since 1571 except the period that it was used as warehouse under British rule), which is a fifteenth century church (Francis 1949, 39–45).

The churches of Famagusta are highly characterised by the churches of its rulers' motherlands. On the early churches like Franciscan Church, St. George the Latins, church of the Carmelites, we may see the distinguishable affects of the approaches in northern and middle France. Catalan elements were introduced into such churches as SS. Peter and Paul, while Italy provided some suggestions for the later churches of the city especially in decoration. A mixture of Byzantine and Gothic elements appeared in Orthodox churches in the city (Francis 1949, 48).

The monuments from the Ottoman period are Ayia Sophia Madrasa, Cafer Pasha Bath and Fountain (next to the Venetian Palace and St. Francis Church), Kertikli Bath, Kizil Bath and Fountain, Kutup Osman Tekke and many fountains. Tombs are the buildings that are most commonly encountered: Kutup Osman Tomb, M. Zuhtu Tombs, Çelebi Mehmet Tomb and Three tombs (Çakkol 84, 89).

Famagusta, which has many monuments built by using the stone blocks of the ancient city of Salamis, encountered the same destiny of being a quarry of old building materials when much of the stone used in constructing the Suez Canal was drawn from it (Forwood 1971, 11). Once the busy 'Emporium of the East', its former greatness is only evidenced by a ruined cathedral and stupendous fortifications (Jeffery 1983, 103).

## The preservation and Restoration Works of Theophilus Mogapgap

Theophilus Mogapgap was born in Famagusta in 1888, as the son of doctor Emin Mogapgap, who was a Syrian Christian. In 1936 – while he was an official in land registration – he met the English writer Norton who published the book 'On the Footsteps of St. Paul'. Norton was very impressed by the historical context of Fama-

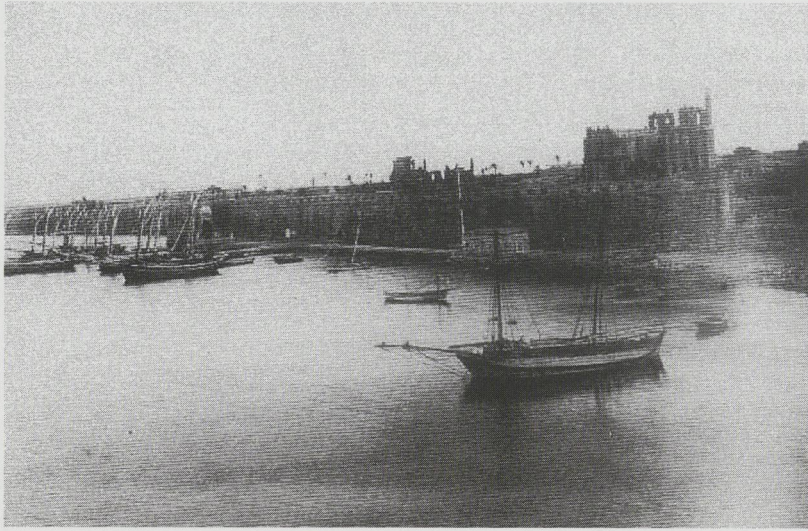


Fig. 3: The port and fortifications of Famagusta in late 19th century.

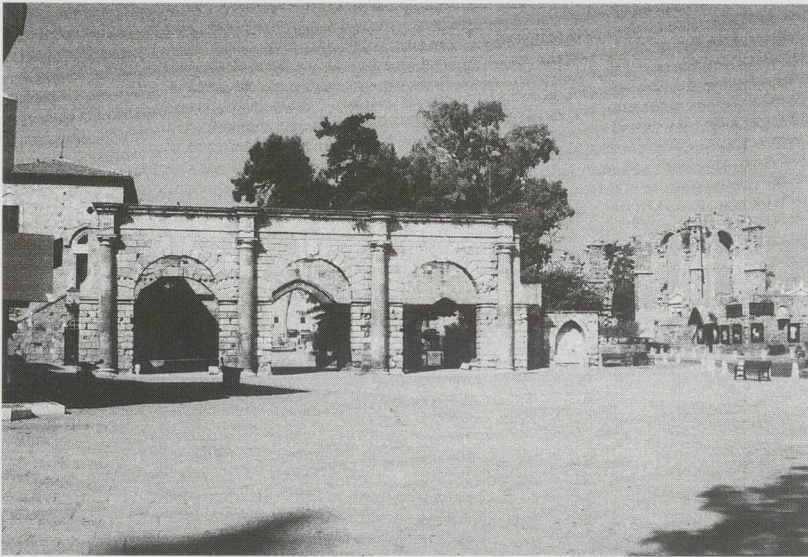


Fig. 4: Palazzo del Proveditore, the Church of St Francis and the Piazza in the centre of the city.

gusta and proposed that Mogapgap should establish an Institute of Archeology in Famagusta. Following the advise of Norton, Mogapgap made great services to Famagusta between 1930 and 1950, when he was the director of the ancient monuments department (Zaimagaoglu 1998, 107).

He almost restored every piece of the historical monuments between the mentioned years. He restored all the churches, and removed the later additions to these monuments. He is said to have been too audacious during the clearance of later additions from the monuments, as an opposition to the valid restoration principles. However, the city owes too much to him,

as he is the reason, that many monuments are still standing. One of the great works he had done was the clearance of debris from the side walls and ramparts of fortifications. The fortifications were almost under the earth till these restoration works.

He photographed every step of these restoration works and left an incredible photographic archive. These photographs let us know the processes and the transformation of the city during this period, and they are the evidences of each action taken.

He was also keen on supplying economic resources for his aim and raised funds also from England by establishing a club, as well as collecting many books printed on the history of Cyprus.

## The City Today

After 1974, the inner city has served as trade centre for a long while. The city is still very important for Northern Cyprus. Its current population is around 2500 (Inner-castle) according to a census from 1986. Not as much as it was in its most glorious days, but rather populated comparing with the number 300 in 1878 (Forwood 1971, 142).

The settlement of Eastern Mediterranean University on another axis towards Salamis caused the development of the city along this axis. Local government and the University are in collaboration now, organising symposiums for discussing the values and problems of the city. They prepared and applied new projects for removing the vehicle traffic from the inner city and refunctioning it as a recreational area as can be found in many European historic city centres.

Famagusta, with its noteworthy fortifications and glorious monuments, has lived through the best and worst times in its history and always impressed its visitors. In its present state it gives evidence of a very important period of Crusaders and western merchants, far away from their native lands, for the trade in the eastern Mediterranean and witness to the authority of Ottoman and British Sovereignties. So, with its celebrated past of so many different cultures it deserves to be studied on as an intersection point on the paths of cultures and to be accepted as a world heritage.

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