

## THE ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD OF AYIA NAPA. HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

Archbishop Filotheos, in his encyclical letter dated 1735, mentions some important information about the monastery and the icon of Ayia Napa:

*"In this venerable and holy monastery of Ayia Napa which is dedicated to our most holy lady of Panayia, there is a wonderful old building that is situated in a beautiful area. There is also a stone cavern, a holy cave, where the light of the sun does not enter but it is enriched by the spiritual light. The grace of the countless miracles and the continuous miracle making, the lady of the angels, the lady of the archangels, the queen of heaven and earth, through her miraculous and holy icon, the devoted Christian goes to this holy cave in faith and piety where it can provoke him a great devoutness. In the cave the believer in piety and tears will kneel before the holy icon of the most holy Theotokos and worship it and ask her to intermedate to her sweetest and only son to forgive their sins"*

(The Great Codex of Cyprus Archdiocese).



The icon of Ayia Napa at the Holy Monastery of Ayia Napa



The icon of Ayia Napa at the Church in Limassol which is dedicated to Ayia Napa

The miraculous icon of Mother of God of Ayia Napa, which is honored and worshiped by both locals and foreigners who have been visiting the monastery, was the reason not only for the construction of the monastery, but also to the high respect towards it. For this reason, both Franks and Venetians also constructed their own extensions at the monastery to honor the miraculous icon.

The height of the icon, according to the description by Oltricht Prefat (1546), was the height of a human and it depicts Panayia holding Jesus Christ. Panayia is depicted full length with her hands in praying position (orans), and with a medallion on her chest showing the face of Christ wearing a crown.

Theotokos is surrounded by prophets, also known as the Tree of Jesse. This type of icon is found back in the Early Christian period and is called Platytera, and it can be seen more often in frescos and mosaics (Panayia Angeloktisti in Kiti village, Platytera of Ayia Sophia in Constantinople etc). The type of Platytera is placed on the inside of the apse. This icon was painted according to the old Byzantine style with gold and silver plating. The hands of Panayia were silver plated, as well as the halos around the faces of Panayia and Christ.



The original icon was either stolen or destroyed by a fire around 1800. In the 1850 another icon was painted of the style of Platytera, but from the known Cornaro School. This icon was semi-destroyed by fire and in 1900 another icon was painted. The iconographic style of Cornaro was the leading style of that period in Cyprus. The replica is covered by an embossed silver cover, decorated with colorful stones and medallions bearing images of the Prophets. The protecting icon with the inscription "Mother of God, the Queen of All, Agia Napa", is lifesize, as Prefat describes, and is listed among the different types of painting the Mother of God in praying position (Orans), like Vlacherniotissa where Christ is depicted in a medallion on the chest of Virgin Mary. The icon of Ayia Napa is of the same type but Virgin Mary wears a crown and its style comes from Italy. The icon is an example of the Frank-Cypriot school of Cornaro, of a relatively later date, and it is a mixture of Byzantine, Latin and Cypriot style.



## CULTURAL ACADEMY

The areas of activities of the Academy are the following:

- Museum of Antiquities and Byzantine icons
- The establishment of a postgraduate course (Masters) on Cyprus Hagiography and Middle East Cultures
- Organization of a library for the study of Middle Eastern Civilizations and Cyprus Hagiography
- Convention Centre, hosting theological, cultural and educational conferences
- Publication of academic papers and literary works
- Organization of various spiritual, cultural and educational events



## DIOCESE OF CONSTANTIA - AMMOCHOSTOS

Address:

P.O. Box 34034, 5309 Paralimni, Cyprus

Telephone: (00357) 23812444

Fax: (00357) 23812450

Homepage: [www.imconstantias.org.cy](http://www.imconstantias.org.cy)

Email: [info@imconstantias.org.cy](mailto:info@imconstantias.org.cy)

## HOLY MONASTERY OF AYIA NAPA

Telephone: (00357) 23722584

Telephone: (00357) 23721785

Fax: (00357) 23721284



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY OF AYIA NAPA

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The monastery of Ayia Napa is located in the southern part of the district of Famagusta. The name of the monastery and its famous icon of the Mother of God points to a once wooded valley in the surrounding area which translates to "Napa" in Greek. One of the local legends claims that the icon was found by a hunter's dog in a hidden cave.

During the Komnenian period (1081-1191) a probably natural cave was enlarged to form a rock-cut church of the Orthodox faith. Its altar screen (templon) can be dated into the late 12th century when Cyprus was part of the Byzantine Empire. A healing spring (ayiasma), still in use today, can be found next to it.



With the arrival of the Franks (1191) the manor of a Lord was installed next to the cave church. The Frankish complex of Ayia Napa with its northern tower, massive cross-vaulted storage rooms in the east and the enwalled courtyard is similar to the Lusignan manor in Kouklia (east of Paphos). The church was expanded with the addition of a Latin chapel. Furthermore, the Ayia Napa aqueduct was built, channelling water to this area.

When the Venetians added Cyprus to their domains (1489), the whole complex was transformed into a monastery which, according to a local inscription, was inaugurated in 1530. In order to function as a monastery, a large hall, aimed for pilgrims was added to the church. The rooms to the east became monk cells. The tower was enlarged and embellished in



accordance to the fashion of the Renaissance (late 15th/early 16th centuries) – perhaps for the use of the abbot. A plethora of Christian confessions visited the monastery, in order to pay tribute to the famous miraculous icon.

After the Ottoman conquest (1571), the monastery was transferred into the authority of the Orthodox Church. In the 17th century the monastery owned large estates and the size of the local community reached its peak.



During this time the eastern arcades were built. However, the most prominent feature of the Ottoman era is the fountain house located in the courtyard which was constructed around the Venetian fountain. This stuccoed limestone octagonal fountain, according to the octagonal early Christian baptisteries, had been most likely relocated from Famagusta immediately after the Ottoman conquest.

The 18th century represents the decline of the monastery, with only very few monks living there. It was finally abandoned in 1758. At approximately the same time, the settlement

next to the monastery started developing when some families began renting the land of the monastery. According to the inscription in the northern arcades, bishop Spyridon repaired the buildings in 1813. Since then the tower was used for communal purposes. It served as a public school and the church became the parish church of the village.



Since the 1940s major restoration projects were executed by the Department of Antiquities. Since 1978 the buildings have been in the use as a Conference centre for the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. With the establishment of the dioceses of Constantia and Ammochostos in 2007, Metropolitan Vasilios announced the foundation of a Cultural Academy with the name "Saint Epiphanius" –the first bishop of Constantia, 4th c.–, transforming the Monastery to a research centre.



The academy's aim is to promote theological, historical and educational studies by exhibiting artefacts in a museum and by organizing and hosting conferences in the monastery of Ayia Napa.

## HOLY WATER – WELL



Inside the cave there is a well which, according to tradition, was dug initially to provide water for the people who sought refuge there during the raids of the pirates. Later on, the water of the well was considered as the consecrated water of the monastery and many people were cured from many health problems.



**THE HOLY GIRDLING OF AYIA NAPA**



## GIRDLE (BELT)

In 1899 C. Enlart mentioned that from the 15th century there was a Holy Girdle of Panayia of Ayia Napa. The holy Girdle, is said to help infertile women and those who experience difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth. The original Holy Girdle was stolen in the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays the replica of the Holy Girdle still attracts many believers who come to venerate it in order to help them overcome their problems.

