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# First Greek Orthodox Temple in Sustainable Cultural Heritage of Nicosia's Historical Urban Texture: Chrysaliniotissa Church and Its Architectural Characteristics

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**Abstract:** The initial development of Nicosia's historical urban texture, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of various civilisations that have shaped the history of Cyprus, can be traced back to the Lusignan period (1191–1489). This urban framework continued to evolve through subsequent eras, including the Venetian (1489–1570), Ottoman (1571–1878), British (1878–1960), and Republic of Cyprus (1960–...) periods, as well as more recent developments. As a result, Nicosia has transformed into an open-air museum, encapsulating the architectural and cultural imprints of its diverse historical influences. Greek Orthodox Churches, significant among the island's historical monuments, continue to function today while preserving their distinctive architectural features, serving as enduring symbols of Christianity in Cyprus. The Chrysaliniotissa Church, a notable example within the Walled City of Nicosia, stands out from other churches due to its origins dating back to the Lusignan period of Cyprus and its unique architectural characteristics. In this paper, qualitative research methods were used based on a literature review for the necessary theoretical information and on-site field studies on the architectural features of the church. This paper aims to examine the Chrysaliniotissa Church, highlighting its architectural features shaped by the influences of various historical periods. Additionally, this paper seeks to underscore the significance of this cultural heritage site in contributing to the sustainability of Nicosia's historical urban texture.

**Keywords:** Nicosia; walled city; orthodox; church; sustainable; cultural heritage

## 1. Introduction

The historical urban texture of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, is characterised by a rich tapestry of architectural works from various civilisations that have shaped the island's heritage, forming a cultural mosaic that endures to this day. Among these structures are places of worship representing diverse religious traditions, with Greek Orthodox Churches serving as vital components of this architectural texture. Most of these churches continue to fulfil their original functions, thereby playing a crucial role in preserving the historical integrity of the Walled City of Nicosia. This paper aims to elucidate the structural identity of the Chrysaliniotissa Church, one of the earliest constructed churches, through a comprehensive analysis of its distinct architectural evolution and design. Furthermore, this paper seeks to underscore the church's significant contribution to the sustainability of Nicosia's historical texture.

The very first formation of the historical urban of Nicosia began with the Lusignan period (1191–1489). During this particular period, structures with functions such as those of palaces, mansions, cathedrals, churches, chapels, and residences were built within the city, and the periphery of Nicosia was surrounded by walls with five gates. Later, during the Venetian period (1489–1570), the initial walls of Nicosia built during the Lusignan period were demolished and replaced by walls with only three gates which still exist today. During the Ottoman period (1571–1878), many buildings assuming the Turkish architectural style

such as that seen in inns, mosques, residences, baths, madrasahs, libraries, and fountains that appeared in Nicosia, and with such works, the Ottoman period left its mark on the historical urban texture of Cyprus's capital today. During the British period, which began in 1878 and lasted until 1960, the island enjoyed financial prosperity; public buildings and residences were built in the English Colonial architectural style. This period saw the introduction of motor vehicles to the island for the very first time with enforced road and transportation taxes. Nicosia continued to be the capital of the Republic of Cyprus, which was established in 1960 based on a mutual partnership between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, Cyprus subsequently becoming an important transit centre, a hub in the Middle East. As a result of the later political disputes, however, between the Turkish and Greek communities in 1964, the city of Nicosia was divided into two parts: the north (Turkish part) and south (Greek part) parts. The division of the walled city, where the historical urban texture of Nicosia is located, also meant the inevitable division of the texture into two parts. In 1981, the 'Nicosia Master Plan', which was drafted with the financial contributions of the United Nations, considered Turkish and Greek sections as a whole, and once more, vehicle and pedestrian traffic regulations were re-arranged.

During the Roman period (50 B.C.–395 A.D.), St. Barnabas and St. Saul (Paul), who are considered to be the founders of the Church of Cyprus, arrived at the island and started spreading Christianity. Concomitantly, Sergius Paulus, the Roman Governor, converted to Christianity and established the Church of Cyprus. The Church of Cyprus was founded by a Christian community abiding by Greek and Byzantine rites and was named 'Cyprus Orthodox Church' (1054 A.D.) in parallel with the Istanbul Patriarchate.

One of the most basic elements of the concept of sustainability is the preservation of historical buildings that reflect the cultural heritage in historical urban textures, together with their original functions, and seeing their continuation into future generations. The preservation of buildings bearing traces of past civilisations is of great importance to ensure the sustainability of their historical existence.

This paper employs qualitative research methods, drawing from a comprehensive literature review of both written and visual resources relevant to the core issues of this paper. These methods are complemented by fieldwork, encompassing observations and examinations of the Chrysaliniotissa Church.

The Chrysaliniotissa Church, built in 1450, is the oldest Greek Orthodox Church within the Walled City of Nicosia and took its current form with additions in different periods. The plan of the building is in an irregular "L" form and has two apses, one of which is comparatively larger. Additionally, there are six columns in the nave where the large apse is located in the interior of the building. As a result of the additions made southwards from the original structure of the church, it has two barrel vaults dividing the building as a transept. The bell tower of the building is located on the south façade. The church was built with a particular masonry construction practise using rubble and rough-hewn stone materials. Smooth-cut stone was used only in the sections added later. The covering system consists of a flat dome lodged on two circular drums made of stone material in the east–west-oriented section and a barrel vault adjacent to the dome in the west, at a lower level than the dome, extending towards the east. On the west façade of the church, there is a portico section made of smooth-cut stone.

Although the plans of the Greek Orthodox Churches within the walls of Nicosia are rectangular with two or three naves, the plan scheme of the Chrysaliniotissa Church differs with its irregular ''L'' shape, which emerged as a result of the additions made to its original form. The use of rubble and rough-cut stone materials in the initial and earlier parts of the church is different from that of the smooth-cut stone, which is the construction material for the majority of other churches. As in all Greek Orthodox Church buildings, the portico of the east–west-oriented building of the Chrysaliniotissa Church extends not only in the west direction but also in the south direction, depending on the plan scheme.

The interior design of the Chrysaliniotissa Church consists of interlocking arches, as a result of the additions made to its original form, a feature not found in other Greek

Orthodox Churches. On the eastern façade of the church, unlike the symmetrical façade layout of Greek Orthodox Churches, there are two polygonal apses covered with corrugated tiles which are covered with a half dome. The apse on the north side is larger than the other. Additionally, the apses have polygonal plans on the outside and circular plans on the inside.

The Chrysaliniotissa Church, as the oldest church within the Walled City of Nicosia, exhibits a unique typology with its unique architectural characteristics, distinct from other Greek Orthodox Churches in the historical texture. This church is an important religious building within the cultural heritage of the island. This church, which continues to exist with its original function today, is one of Cyprus's important cultural assets that should be carefully preserved and maintained for the future in order to contribute to the sustainability of the historical city texture of Nicosia.

The island of Cyprus, which throughout its history remained under the rule of numerous sovereigns, has a very rich architectural heritage affiliated with different civilisations. Thus, although there are many buildings with contrasting functions stemming from different periods of Cyprus in the historical urban texture of the capital Nicosia, Greek Orthodox Church buildings can be counted as one of the building types. It was seen that the planning of basilica church architecture, which evolved after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the official religion in 313 A.D., started to increase in the historical texture of Nicosia. The Chrysaliniotissa Church, as the oldest Greek Orthodox Church within the Walled City of Nicosia, serves as a significant example of ecclesiastical architecture. Its original features, along with structural additions made during various periods, reflect distinct architectural characteristics that set it apart from other Greek Orthodox Churches. Moreover, it was selected as the focus of our research due to its unique qualities and its contribution to the sustainability of Nicosia's historical urban texture.

The fact that no study has yet been conducted to introduce the Chrysaliniotissa Church makes this research important; it is the church with the oldest construction date amongst the Greek Orthodox Churches within the Walled City of Nicosia, and specifically, its architectural features should be studied in order to reveal the architectural influences in its design characteristics and finally to examine how its sustainable cultural heritage structure enables its continued existence in the historical urban texture. Additionally, documenting Cyprus's cultural heritage, which is on the verge of becoming non-existent, makes our research even more urgent and worthwhile.

This article, following the introductory section in conjunction with the research methods deployed, establishes the conceptual foundations based on a literature review. The materials collected with regard to Nicosia's historical urban texture, Orthodoxy and churches in Cyprus, sustainability in the historical urban texture, the design characteristics of Chrysaliniotissa, the oldest Greek Orthodox Church within the Walled City of Nicosia, and the impact of various architectural influences constitute our field study. The results of our research; an analysis and assessment of these results in the context of sustainable cultural heritage within the historical urban texture of Nicosia; and the final evaluations of these results together with the conclusion constitute the limitations of this research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Historical Urban Texture of Nicosia

The oldest formations recognisable within the historical urban texture of today's Nicosia belong to the Lusignan period, which lasted in Cyprus between 1191 and 1489. The Lusignan dynasty spent a relatively large amount of their income on the development of Nicosia and as such erected palaces, mansions, residences, cathedrals, churches, and chapels, each owned by different Lusignan Lords [1]. Major works in the city dating from this period include Saint Sophia Cathedral (Selimiye Mosque), Saint Nicholas Church (Bedesten), Saint Catherina Cathedral (Haydarpaşa Mosque), Saint Mary Church (Ömerge Mosque), and Saint Sofia Cathedral (Selimiye Mosque) (1209–1347) (Figure 1) [2], which is where the coronation ceremonies of the kings of Cyprus were held and is undoubtedly the

most significant work of the Lusignan period, built in the Gothic style as a legacy of the history of medieval Cyprus with its form and ornaments. Saint Nicholas Church (Bedesten), a Byzantine Basilica built in the XIVth century, was renovated time after time. It maintained its original function until the XXth century [3]. Lusignans during the reign of Henry II (A.D. 1285–1324) constructed a nine-mile (approximately thirteen kms)-long, five-gate wall with eleven bastions encircling the city. These gates were Saint Dominic, Trakhones, Saint Andrew (Agios Andreas), and Bazaar (Customs Gate and Lower Gate) [1] (Figure 2 [4]). The Lusignan Palace (1476), which served as the official residence of Catherine Cornaro, the last queen of the Lusignan period, was one of the major works of this period. The most apparent detail indicating that it was built in the Gothic style is the corbelled balcony with a Gothic window on the upper floor. Additionally, the ground floor of the Lusignan Palace consisted of stone porticoes with pointed arches, and the upper floor comprised wooden porticoes [5] (Figure 3 [6]).
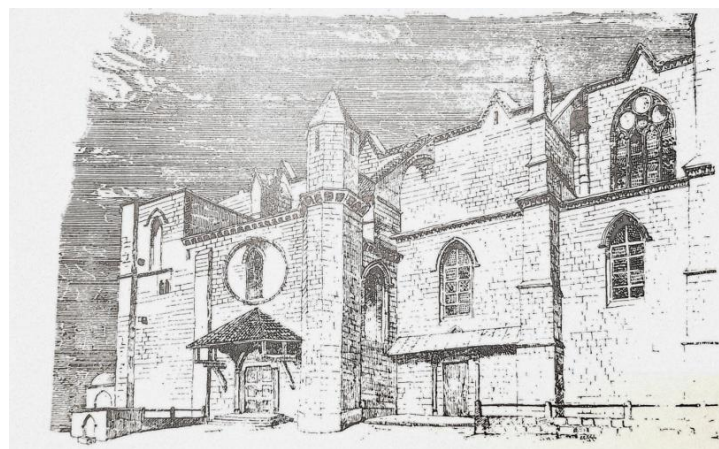
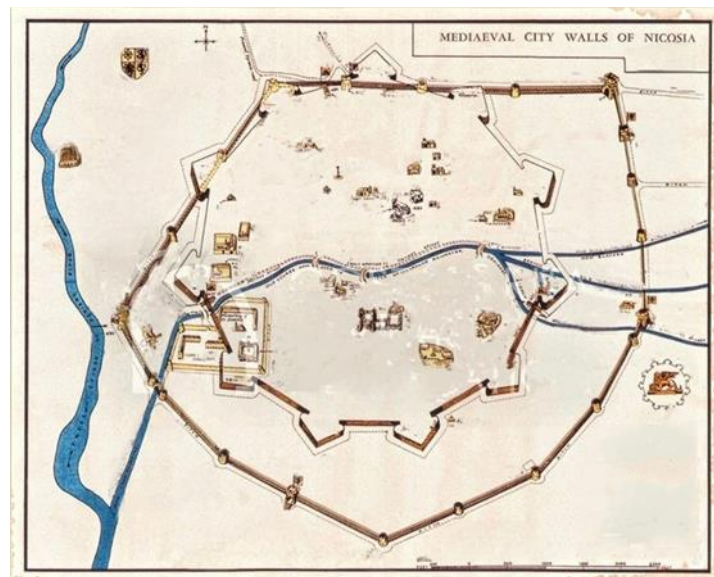

**Figure 1.** St. Sophia Cathedral [2].



**Figure 2.** The Lusignan (1191–1489) and Venetian (1489–…) walls of Nicosia [4].

**Figure 3.** The front and back façades of the Lusignan Palace [6].

During the Venetian period, which started in 1489 and lasted until 1570, Nicosia became the capital of the island. In light of the fact that Venetians exhausted the majority of their revenues on military expenses, they could not contribute to the development of the historical urban texture of Nicosia. The Venetians demolished Nicosia's walls built during the Lusignan period, and between 1567 and 1670 [7], they replaced them with the current walls, encompassing eleven bastions and three gates and stretching a diameter of four thousand eight hundred meters. The aforementioned gates were then named in line with the entrance to the city of Nicosia from other cities: Porta Guliana (Famagusta Gate), Porta Del Providotore (Kyrenia Gate), and Porta di S. Domenico (Paphos Gate). Furthermore, each of the eleven bastions were named after the Venetian nobles who defended the city: Flatro (Zeytinli-Kandil), Loredano (Cevizli-Derviş-Söğütlü), Barbaro (Musalla), Quirini (Ammo), Mula (Zahra), Rokkas (Kaytaz Ağa), Tripoli (Mill-Cemetery), D' Avila (Black) İsmail), Kostanza (Bayraktar), Podokataro (Sazlı), and Graffa (Altun) [1]. As an insignia of their dominance and potency, the Venetians erected the column, with the alias the Venetian Column, that they brought from the ruins of Salamis in the southeast direction of the palace, which served as an administrative building (Figure 4) [8]. Another important work of the Venetian period was the Venetian House, built in the Gothic style (Figure 5).
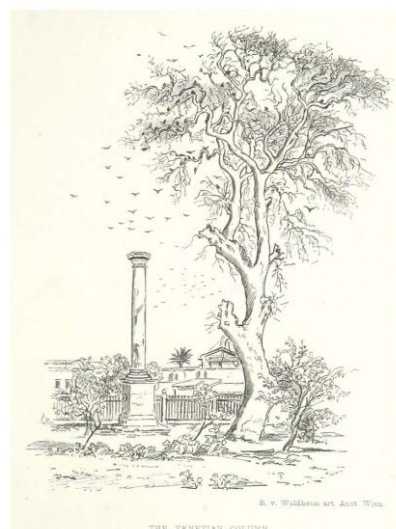


**Figure 4.** Venetian Column [8].

**Figure 5.** Venetian House (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

During the Ottoman period, which started in 1571, Nicosia was once more the chosen capital of the island [9]. And with the commencement of the Ottoman period, construction projects were launched; first, several churches were converted into mosques, followed by edifices built in the Turkish architectural style. These included inns; mosques; residences; hamams, which are today's baths; madrasahs; libraries; and fountains. The established trade centres, workshops, and inns especially enabled the city of Nicosia to become economically and socially more efficacious [7]. According to the census conducted in 1723 and recorded in the Tahrir Book, there were four thousand houses, sixteen neighbourhoods, two Great Mosques (Cami-i Kebir), two common mosques (ten mosques by 1835), twelve masjids, three madrasahs, four lodges and zawiyas, five baths, thirty fountains, and six libraries [1]. During this period, Arabahmet District, where administrative officials usually resided, and Selimiye District, where religious officials resided, flourished and still exist today as two important neighbourhoods of Nicosia [9] (Figures 6 and 7 [10]).



**Figure 6.** Arabahmet District, Nicosia (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

**Figure 7.** Selimiye District, Nicosia [10].

During the British period (1878–1960), the city of Nicosia continued to be the capital. It also turned out to be particularly throughout this period that the island flourished financially; public buildings and residential dwellings were built in British Colonial architecture style with cut stone materials. Especially with the arrival of motor vehicles to the island, existing roads were widened and opened to traffic, and a similar growth occurred outside the city walls [11]. Demolitions were made to ensure easier traffic flow, and part of the city walls on both sides of the Kyrenia Gate were knocked down to allow motor vehicles to enter and exit the walled city conveniently [9] (Figure 8). In addition, the Lusignan Palace, which existed primarily as an administrative centre since the Lusignan period, was demolished in 1901, and the District Court Building (Government Mansion), which still serves as a public building today, was erected in situ [12] (Figure 9).
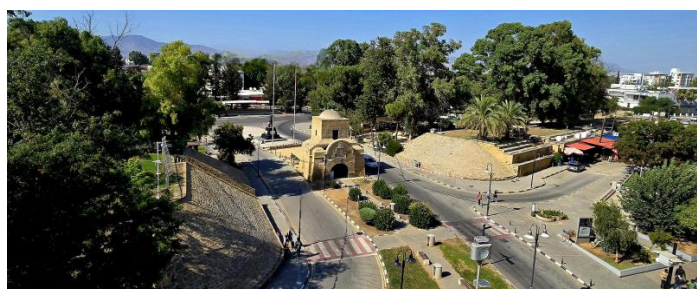


**Figure 8.** Kyrenia Gate, Nicosia (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).



**Figure 9.** Court Building, Nicosia (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

It is a known fact that, especially since the 1950s, when Cypriot architects studying abroad returned to the island, a transition from the masonry construction system to the reinforced concrete frame system occurred [11], and multi-storey buildings were constructed for scholastic and administrative purposes [13]. Moreover, it was common to see Italian and Greek architectural influences becoming very evident in the buildings built by Greek masters in the city of Nicosia during the British period [11]. The bay window components

utilised in the residential architecture of the Ottoman period were modified in the British period and evolved into a balcony.

Pursuant to the Zurich and London agreements signed between the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, the Republic of Cyprus was established on 16 August 1960. A pivotal follow up was that the Nicosia International Airport served as a hub connecting the island with the international community worldwide, strengthening the new republic's international relations. Due to the fact that Nicosia became the capital of the newly proclaimed republic, social and commercial activities in the city thrived and enabled the city to develop swiftly. In this process, multi-storey reinforced concrete buildings that emerged in the city also instigated a change in the historical texture of the city. In 1964, the city of Nicosia was partitioned into two parts, the north (Turkish part) and the south (Greek part), demarcated with the 'Green Line', a line drawn stemming from political disputes and the consequent armed conflicts between the Turkish and Greek communities [14,15]. The thriving financial state of affairs in the south part of Nicosia brought about a surge of rising new construction sites and multi-storey buildings to the agenda, the division adversely affecting the historical texture within the city walls. On the contrary, in the north part, the absence of new construction sites due to poor economic circumstances had a positive impact on the historical urban texture.

Furthermore, politically motivated factors triggered relocations from regions in the vicinity of Nicosia, increasing the need for housing, meaning that many historical premises were used for residential purposes. This usage inevitably prompted exposure to various impairments of those premises. Furthermore, as a consequence of the political events of 1974, the island was divided into the north and south, also paving the way to officially registering the demarcation of the city of Nicosia. The Turkish Cypriots previously residing in the southern regions of Cyprus relocated to the north, increasing the population of the city. And with the increasing population, inevitably, numerous issues emerged concerning heavy construction work, zoning plans, transportation, sewerage, and infrastructure deficiencies [16].

On 13 February 1975, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was declared in the north part of Cyprus, and Nicosia once more became the capital of the so-called Federal State. The surging property development coupled with new construction sites in the north part of Nicosia proved to be contradictory to the historical texture, adversely affecting the historical urban texture ever since. Concurrently with the institutionalisation of the organisational framework of the new administration, work on historical buildings was instigated. The conservation efforts of historical textures were authorised by the "High Supreme Council of Immovable Antiquities and Monuments", an administrative section of the Department of Antiquities and Museums. The 'Nicosia Master Plan', backed by the provision of the United Nations' financial contributions and funding in 1981, set the scene for new vehicle and pedestrian traffic to be regulated within the walled city, considered to be the centre of the city. In partnership and mutual cooperation between the Nicosia Turkish and Greek Municipalities in conjunction with the City Planning Departments, the Turkish and Greek areas constituted the whole of the city [17] (Figure 10 [18]). And despite the phase of a relatively overwhelming weaker economy of the Turkish part, the absence of new construction sites in North Nicosia worked out to be an advantage to the historical urban texture, as compared to that of South Nicosia.

The capital of the declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, in 1983, hailed to be North Nicosia. The new administrative structure cherished contributing to the development of the Nicosia walled city texture. As a result of this restructuring, several ministries, trade centres, and administrative and commercial premises located within the historical texture and thereafter banks and food and beverage venues in the vicinity were also established [19] (Figure 11 [9]). Additionally, since the inhabitants of the walled city relocated mostly outside of the city walls during this period, the buildings within the walls were leased or sold for residential purposes to expatriated families of low economic and social echelons whose unconscious and insentient usage of the buildings and premises

spawned inevitable impairments of the historical texture as a whole. Fostered by inadequate conservation policies, the lack of close supervision, and the loose control of the relevant authorised public institutions, the ongoing damage to the historical urban texture still prevails. Nevertheless, a new awakening surge of restorations and renovations focusing on the historical texture is leading to new travel and leisure venues, and the epiphany of a rejuvenated, vibrant historical urban texture of Nicosia is appearing.
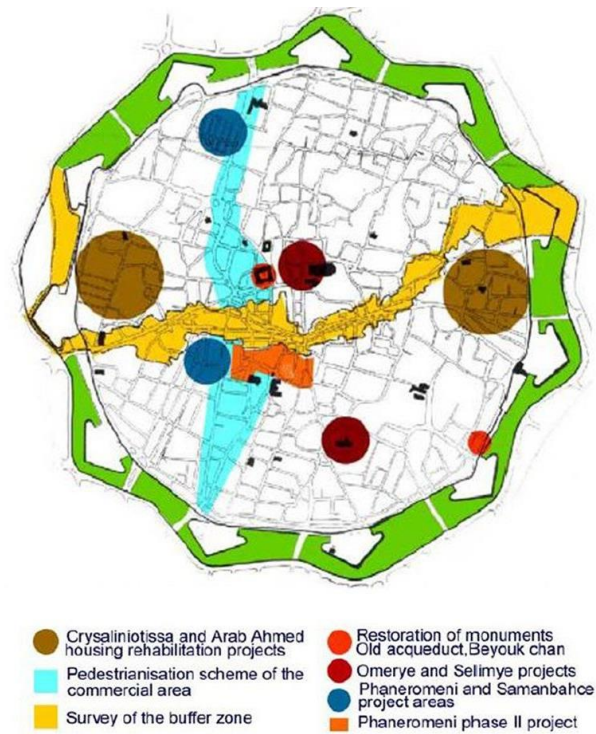


**Figure 10.** Nicosia master plan, 1981 [18].



**Figure 11.** Divided Nicosia walled city plan—1990 [9].

## 2.2. Orthodoxy and Churches in Cyprus

The island of Cyprus is found in a strategically crucial location in the eastern Mediterranean, subjugated by numerous sovereigns throughout its past history, which had a marked impact on its demographic and social structure. Cultural diversities were exemplified by historical regions such as Anatolia, Alexandria, Antakya, Syria, and Mesopotamia, and the confluence of all thrived on the island, having hosted a plethora of such civilisations and cultures [20]. The religions of pre-Christian eras (i.e., before the 1st century), such as those in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Rome, and Greece, were all adopted and flourished in Cyprus. Moreover, the Church of Cyprus is one of the earliest churches, founded during the first apostolic journeys of the apostles Paul and Barnabas [6]. During the Roman period (50 B.C.–395 A.D.), St. Barnabas and St. Paul arrived in Cyprus and soon after started to spread the Christian faith. Thereupon, the Roman Governor of the island, Sergius Paulus, converted to Christianity and pioneered in establishing the Church of Cyprus [21]. Barnabas was a Cypriot from Salamis. The two apostles preached Christianity, starting with Salamis and later on in Paphos, where the Roman Proconsul Sergius Paulus resided, who converted to the Christian faith. Saint Heraclidios, considered to be the first Christian Bishop appointed, was entreated to remain and settle in the ancient city of Tomassos by the two apostles. Later on, St. Barnabas returned back to Cyprus, where he was in retribution stoned to death by the Jews (75 A.D.) [6]. Barnabas was entombed in Salamis by Agios Marcos, along with a copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew. Four and a half centuries later in 488 A.D., Archbishop Anthemios of Constantia's divination revealed the location of the tomb; prophecy hailed as a milestone in the history of the Church of Cyprus [22]. Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, set foot in Cyprus in the IVth century and bestowed upon several churches pieces of the real cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, as part of the island's lore. When St. Helena returned to Istanbul, she took steps to colonise the island [6]. As a result of the showdown that developed between the churches of Rome and Istanbul (1054 B.C.), the Church of Rome identified itself as encompassing the term "Catholic", a synonymity with universal acclaim, the church of all Christians, the elucidation suggesting the affiliation of the Roman Church with the Papacy and the influence of Rome. This was a statutory constraint mandatory for all churches. The Istanbul Patriarchate together with the Eastern Christian Churches located in Istanbul instead resorted to use the term 'Orthodox', meaning 'the true belief'. The subsequent ramifications of the disparity within the Christian world followed. Christian communities that thrived and flourished under the influence of Latin rites were affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, whereas Christians of Greek and Byzantine rites were affiliated with the Istanbul Patriarchate. Still, another consequence was that of the Church of Cyprus, founded by a Christian community of Greek and Byzantine rites, which was granted the title 'Cyprus Orthodox Church' in parallel with the Patriarchate in Istanbul [20]. Enclaved within the walls of Nicosia still are the nine Orthodox Churches of the Chrysaliniotissa Church (1450), St. John Church (1662), Tripiotis (Archangelos) Church (1695), St. George Church (1719), St. Antonios Church (1743), St. Lukas Church (1758), Faneromeni Church(1792), St. Savvas Church (1851), and St. Kassianos Church (1854) [23].

## 2.3. Sustainability in Historic Urban Texture

Sustainability was first coined as a term meaning 'existence capability' in the second period of the XXth century [24]. The concept of sustainability is by no means a new concept and is applied in many branches of science. Thus, preserving historical edifices, especially those fostering cultural heritage enclosed within historical urban textures, along with their original and primary functions for the purpose of continuing into future generations, should be contemplated as one of the most fundamental issues of sustainability [25]. Historical textures are venues that uphold the social, cultural, and economic circumstances, lifestyles, and aesthetic values of civilisations of past eras [26]. The edifices within a historical environment are considered to represent historical data that define and describe the architectural identity of a specific region, with regional architectural styles, space

designs, construction techniques, murals, wood carvings, and ornaments [27]. Historical edifices, which foster cultural architecture, are of paramount significance and should be contemplated as heritage not only in the context of the history of the communities in which they are located but also in the context of world history. In addition to the issues arising from the ever-increasing population size of cities, common perspectives surfacing in relation to and concerning the prevalence of historical buildings in the context of unplanned urbanisation prompted the Council of Europe to declare 1975 to be the World Architectural Heritage Year. Subsequently, the Amsterdam Declaration was issued, stating that the social texture should be preserved; the pertinent function of edifices should be identified and stated; restoration techniques should be applied; and, moreover, the physical environmental context of historical edifices should be conserved [24]. In order to ensure the sustainability of historical edifices bearing the traces of past civilisations, conservation, consolidation, and re-functioning practices have given rise to the integrated conservation approach. Preserving and upholding the original state of historical buildings by re-functioning them has become a very crucial issue for ensuring the sustainability of each of the components, and reinforcements can be imposed later on if the assumed function ceases to exist. For the sole purpose of protecting cultural heritage, a number of sustainability methods suitable for conducting the restoration and renovation of historical edifices in a more vigorous manner are currently available [24].

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This article employs a qualitative research methodology, integrating a comprehensive literature review of both written and visual sources pertinent to the foundational issues of this research. Additionally, fieldwork was conducted through on-site observations and examinations at the Chrysaliniotissa Church.

### 3.2. Data Collection

Firstly, within the scope of conceptual foundations, a thorough investigation into the formation and development of Nicosia's historical urban texture was conducted. This texture reflects a rich architectural heritage shaped by the Venetian, Ottoman, British, and Republic of Cyprus periods, with origins tracing back to the Lusignan period (1191–1489)—the earliest surviving historical era in Nicosia's city centre. In examining the role of Orthodoxy and churches in Cyprus, particular attention was given to the spread of Christianity on the island, the establishment of the Orthodox Church, and the influence of religious institutions on cultural development. To address sustainability in the historical urban texture, an extensive literature review was undertaken. Relevant books, articles, theses, and other documents were analysed to understand the emergence of sustainability concepts, the significance of sustainability in historic urban contexts, and applicable reservation methods. Following this, additional resources concerning the history of the Chrysaliniotissa Church—an essential component of this field study—were reviewed. Necessary information was compiled, and a plan diagram was constructed to support further analysis.

### 3.3. Data Collection Tools

In this comprehensive field study examining the architectural characteristics of the Chrysaliniotissa Church, the plan scheme, sourced from archival records, was initially verified through on-site comparisons, which allowed for the distinction between original and subsequent additions to the structure. Observations were conducted on the stone construction materials, and the specific types of stone used were identified. Observations of the vaults and domes, which constitute the church's covering system, were also documented, along with those of their covering materials. Starting from the western façade, the façades and the main entrance were examined in detail, with solid-void details being recorded. On-site examinations of the church's interior unveiled its distinctive character-

istics, while details on the decorative elements on both the exterior and interior surfaces were meticulously recorded. Additionally, comprehensive photographic documentation was undertaken to capture the current condition of both the church's exterior and interior.

### 3.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Through field studies conducted on the Chrysaliniotissa Church, the architectural characteristics of the structure were identified and analysed. A comparative evaluation was undertaken to highlight the distinctions between this church and other Greek Orthodox Churches within the Walled City of Nicosia, with particular attention to its original condition. Notably, the church exhibits a distinct topology reminiscent of Byzantine Basilicas and holds a significant place within the historical urban texture of Nicosia. This paper emphasises the necessity of preserving and revitalising the church, underscoring its importance to the sustainability of Nicosia's historical urban texture.

### 3.5. Research Plan and Process

The research plan outlines the studies conducted, detailing the methodology and structure of the research process. Additionally, a schematic representation (Figure 12) illustrates the sequence of these studies and their placement within the sections of this paper.
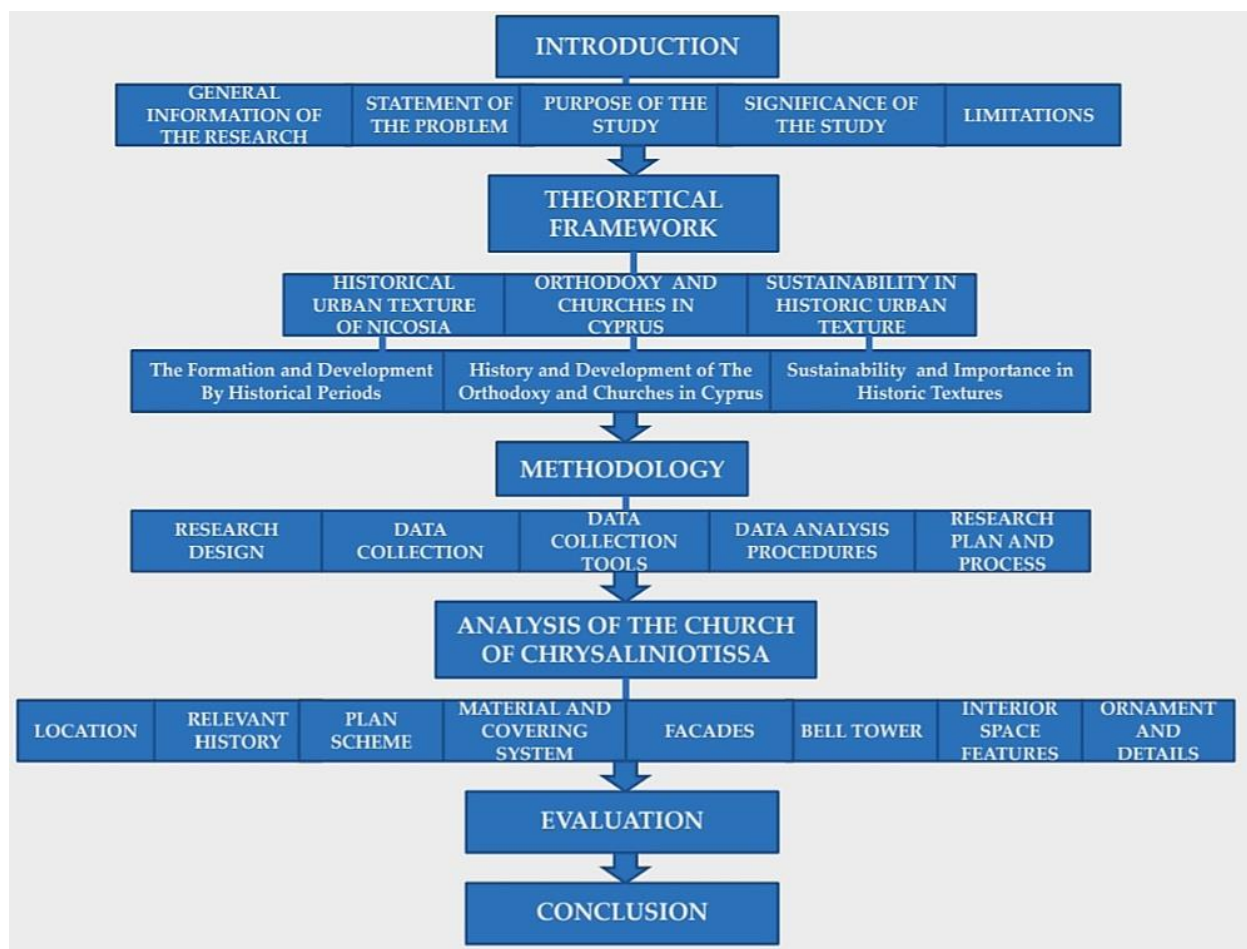


**Figure 12.** Research process scheme.

## 4. The Church of St. Chrysaliniotissa

The Church of St. Chrysaliniotissa is situated in the Chrysaliniotissa district within the Walled City of Nicosia. According to various historical resources, it is believed to have been the first cathedral of Nicosia constructed by St. Barnabas at the close of the Xth

century [28] (Figure 13 [29]). The name 'St. Chrysaliniotissa', which translates to 'Our Lady of the Golden Linen', derives from the flax fields that once existed in the area [30]. The church was later built in 1450 by Helena Paleologina, the daughter of the Despot of the Peloponnese and wife of the Lusignan King John II, during the Lusignan period in Cyprus (1191–1489) [3]. Architecturally, the structure exemplifies the characteristics of the Middle Byzantine period (Xth–XIIth centuries) in the Walled City of Nicosia, initially comprising a single nave, a dome, and a barrel vault. While the original design has been altered through subsequent additions, remnants of its medieval form remain discernible [3]. The portico of the building was constructed during the Lusignan period, with the south transept being expanded, and further modifications were made during the Venetian period (1489–1570) in the XVth century. Additionally, the church underwent alterations during the Ottoman period in Cyprus (1571–1878), ultimately resulting in its present form [23] (Figure 14).



**Figure 13.** Chrysaliniotissa in the Walled City of Nicosia [29].



**Figure 14.** Chrysaliniotissa Church (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

The plan scheme of the Chrysaliniotissa Church consists of an irregular 'L' form with two apses located side by side on the eastern façade, with the larger one on the northern side, unequal to each other, polygonal on the outside and semicircular on the inside. On the west façade, there is an inverted 'Z'-shaped portico section with arches in the form of a portico. There is a side nave to the north of the middle nave in the east–west direction of the irregular 'L'-shaped plan (Figure 15a,b) [22].

(**a**)                        (**b**)
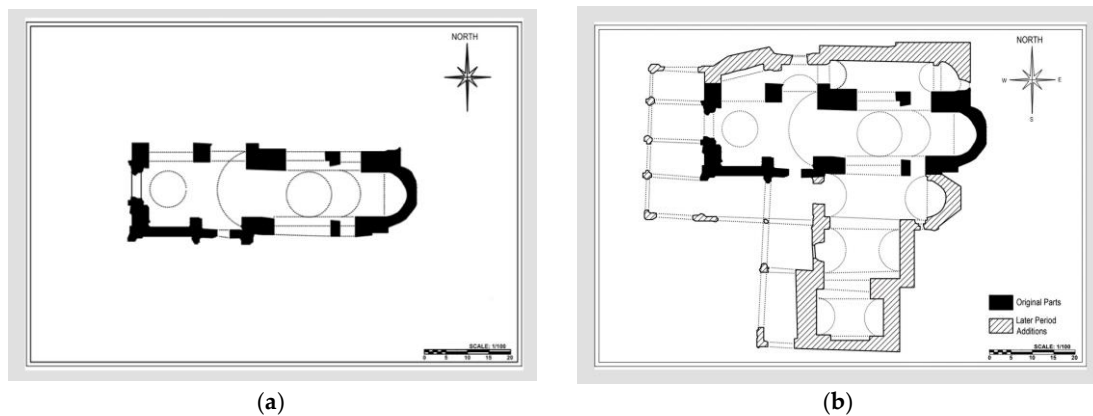
**Figure 15.** (**a**) Original plan of Chrysaliniotissa Church; (**b**) current plan of Chrysaliniotissa Church [22].

The Chrysaliniotissa Church was constructed utilising a masonry construction practice where rubble and rough-cut (Figure 16) stone materials were used [31]. In the sections that were added later apart from the initial main section, smooth-cut stone material was used. The covering system of the church, in the east–west section, is a low dome of rubble stone, lodged on two high circular drums of stone material, and a barrel vault adjacent to the dome in the west extends eastwards at a lower level than the dome. The covering system of the remaining parts of this section and the north–south-oriented part of the church is a flat roof (Figure 14). There are eight semicircular arched windows surrounding both of the dome drums. The domes and barrel vaults are covered with corrugated tiles. The top of the portico is mounted with timbers arranged side by side on circular cross-section wooden beams extending in the opposite direction to the semicircular arches and a hipped roof covered with corrugated tiles. The apses in the eastern direction are covered with a stone half dome covered with corrugated tiles. Lodged on the south façade are the two domes of the same code and a barrel vault connecting these domes (Figure 16). Following the Lusignan and Venetian periods (1191–1571) emerged a period in which the "Franco-Byzantine" style dominated [22].



**Figure 16.** Dome of Chrysaliniotissa Church (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

In the west façade of the church where the main door is located, constructed from smooth-cut stone are the four semicircular arches in the east–west-aligned section and two pointed arches in the north–south-aligned section. The second semicircular arch off the north is higher than the others, and the portico's cover is emphasised to form a triangular pediment on this arch. There are also three arches on the west façade, facing north, and ornaments with floral motifs with carved stirrup stones (Figure 17).

**Figure 17.** West façade of Chrysaliniotissa Church (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

On the eastern façade of the church are the two polygonal apses covered with a half dome shielded with corrugated tiles. The apse on the north side consisting of two layers is larger than the one on the south side. It exhibits a polygonal form with 2.40 m elevation, and further above this elevation, a circular form is displayed. Both apses are covered with corrugated tiles. In addition, on the edge of the roof facing the north of this section is a gargoyle exhibiting an animal figure of stone in the Gothic style. In the northern direction of this section, there is a vertical rectangular window opening with iron bars, and next to the same section is the main apse section. It is of circular form, up to 1.00 m elevation, and further above this elevation, it exhibits a polygonal form. On the north side of the façade, there is a vertical rectangular-sectioned, wooden, single-wing door. On the south side of this door, there is a rectangular niche approximately one meter above the ground (Figure 18a,b).



| (**a**) | (**b**) |

**Figure 18.** (**a**) East façade of Chrysaliniotissa Church; (**b**) apse detail (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

In the niche on the wall surface extending along the street, approximately along the axis of the northern façade, there is a level-positioned, rectangular-shaped, iron-barred window opening within a pointed arch that was later filled and sealed (Figure 19). In the middle section of the north façade, there is an arch opening that is thought to have been closed later, with a window below it. Above this window, there is a spolia ornament with floral motifs in a frame formed by repurposed stone (Figure 20). On the east side of this particular façade axis is a rectangular window opening with iron bars. The portico section located on the western edge of the façade opens to the north with a semicircular arch. Moreover, in this section, close to the roof, there is a window in the form of a flat arch that allows natural light to enter the interior.

**Figure 19.** North façade of Chrysaliniotissa Church (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).



**Figure 20.** Detail of window (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

On the façade at the south end, there are two vertical rectangular window openings with iron bars, one of which is at the bottom and the other at the top. The window opening on the arch above the façade is smaller than the one below. Above the second façade piece extending from south to north, inside the arch, there is an almost square rectangular window opening with iron bars. Starting from the apse on the south side, the façade extends southwards in two levels. Each level has a semicircular arch arising from the vault cover system (Figure 21a,b).



(**a**)          (**b**)

**Figure 21.** (**a**) South façade of Chrysaliniotissa Church; (**b**) south façade (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

The bell tower of the church is located at the southern end of the north–south-oriented section of the building. The tower, of smooth-cut stones, has a rectangular plan, and the bell within is enclosed by the semicircular arched space in the north–south direction on the axis of the tower. On the flat-roofed tower, there are bollards of stone, approximately forty centimetres high, rectangular in section, with cross figures carved on them, one on the axis, one at each corner in the south direction, and one on the axis along the north direction. There is also a metal cross on the bollard in the north direction (Figure 22).

**Figure 22.** Bell tower of Chrysaliniotissa (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

There are two apses in the church, which possess the characteristics of the space formation of the Middle Byzantine period. One of them is located in the main space with the iconostasis in front of it; the other, located at the beginning of the section, was added later and extends northwards next to the main apse [31,32]. Two barrel-vaulted passages were added to the north and south sides of the church, later to be combined into a single space. In the east–west-oriented section, which constitutes the original plan of the church, there are semicircular and pointed arches intersecting each other between the main nave and the side naves. These arches are made of rubble and rough-cut stone materials. Moreover, within the section that was added later, extending southwards, the load-bearing system consists of pointed arches made of rubble and rough-cut stone materials. There is a pointed arch in the middle nave where the iconostasis is located and a semicircular arch between the other naves. There is a pointed arched portico in front of the southern extension, which was added later (Figure 23). With the additions made, the current rendition of the church is wider than its original structure and has two apses.



**Figure 23.** Interior space of Chrysaliniotissa Church (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

There are six columns in the nave where the large apse is located. Two of the columns are located in front of the iconostasis; behind these, the other two are located westwards; and the remaining two are in the narthex space. The two domes of the church, constructed using stone, are in the direction of the nave where the larger apse is located. In front of the apse in the main space is an iconostasis displaying treasured icons from the XIVth and XVth centuries [5,32] (Figure 24a [33], Figure 24b). The subsequent outcome of the

expansions implemented off the main structure of the church towards the north and south enabled the use of these areas for worship. There are two barrel vaults that were added later, extending southwards and partitioning the edifice into a transept. The northern side nave of the church narrows down and elongates westwards. The Church of Chrysaliniotissa has an abundant collection of ancient and rare icons, some of which are believed to have been recovered from the Cathedral of Panagia Chrysodighitiria (Guild Mother of God), now known as St. Nicholas (Bedestan) [32]. The church took its current form through reconstructions endeavoured within different periods. The narthex section of the edifice was rebuilt, and the south transept of the church was extended. The door and portico opening to this transept are from the XVth century. They were constructed using XIXth-century materials and reorganised during the Venetian period [34]. There are hand-carved gilded icons from the XVIIIth century in the church and several icons that may have been from the church of Our Lady of Hodegetria. Most of these icons today are preserved and kept in the Archbishop Makarios III. Pious Foundation. There is also a distinct icon of the Virgin Mary in the church, known as either "Panagia Agapitiki" or "Panagia Misitiki" [3].
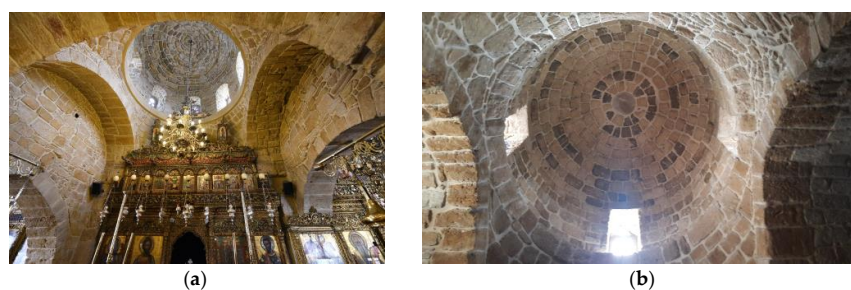


**Figure 24.** (**a**) Chrysaliniotissa Church, iconostasis detail [32]; (**b**) dome (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

The west façade of the inverted 'Z'-shaped portico of the Chrysaliniotissa Church features an intricate array of carvings influenced by Franco-Byzantine design elements [25]. The architectural details include horizontally aligned acanthus leaf motifs and a broad cylindrical profile encircling the arch's curve from the exterior to the interior. Floral motifs are engraved on stones, each positioned to resemble a gabled roof split in two directions. Further architectural embellishments include three symmetrically placed curvilinear stone profiles that align with the direction of the entrance (Figure 25). The semicircular window on the south side of the door is framed by three cylindrical profiles running horizontally from north to south, beneath which are symmetrically carved stone masks adorned with grapevine patterns. Flanking these masks are additional floral decorations. Above the window is a vertical rectangular relief depicting the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus (Figure 26). Floral motifs continue to embellish the stringer of the arches, enhancing the overall ornamental complexity of the portico (Figures 27 and 28).



**Figure 25.** Secondary door ornament (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

**Figure 26.** Window ornament of west façade (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).



**Figure 27.** Corner of portico (southwest) (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).



**Figure 28.** Ornament detail of column (Ş. Karaderi, 2024).

## 5. Evaluation

The Chrysaliniotissa Church, examined in detail on-site as part of a recent field study, is recognised as the oldest Greek Orthodox Church within the Walled City of Nicosia, with

its construction dating back to 1450, during Cyprus's Lusignan period. While the church's architectural style is predominantly Gothic, it incorporates the traditional Byzantine Basilica plan common to Cyprus. The structure exemplifies the enduring influence of Byzantine Church architecture on the typical layout of Orthodox Churches.

Byzantine Church architecture, typically characterised by a central dome and a geometric cross form, often followed a single-nave plan or, in some cases, a two- or three-nave plan typology in its simplest expression. These design features are prominently reflected in the structure of Greek Orthodox Churches. However, the Chrysaliniotissa Church diverges from this original form; an additional section, parallel to the primary nave, was constructed on the north side. Additionally, two parallel sections with barrel vaults, each half the length of the church and situated side by side, were added on the southern side.

As the oldest Greek Orthodox Church structure, the Chrysaliniotissa Church exhibits original plan elements and a covering system constructed from rubble and rough masonry stone. In contrast, later additions and repairs employed finely cut stone material, consistent with the construction techniques characteristic of Greek Orthodox Churches from the XVIIth, XVIIIth, and XIXth centuries.

Consistent with the typical orientation of Greek Orthodox Churches in Cyprus, which are aligned along an east–west axis, the Chrysaliniotissa Church follows this spatial arrangement. A later addition to the original structure includes a portico, which extends across the west façade of the narthex, as well as the south and west façades of the subsequently added southern extension. The additions to both the northern and southern sides of the church have not only enhanced the interior but also expanded the worship area.

The iconostasis of the Chrysaliniotissa Church is positioned within the main nave. The expansion of spaces toward the southern part of the building led to the formation of intertwined arches within the interior. The church's covering system consists of two stone-built, circular structures that reflect the characteristics of Byzantine architecture. These include a flattened dome constructed from rubble stone material, positioned on a high pulley, and a barrel vault extending from the dome in the western direction, descending to the lower level.

The plan schemes of other Greek Orthodox Churches in the Walled City of Nicosia, constructed during the XVIIth, XVIIIth, and XIXth centuries, typically follow a rectangular layout, often incorporating one or two side naves. While some churches feature a single apse, others possess two apses, depending on the number of naves. Porticos are generally positioned solely on the west side of churches, serving as the main entrance façade. In terms of covering systems, domes are commonly employed, supported by polygonal pulleys.

In contrast, the Chrysaliniotissa Church distinguishes itself from other churches through its unique 'L'-shaped plan. Notable features include a side nave added later to align with the northern landform, a small apse in the southern extension, an inverted 'Z'-shaped portico extending to both the west and south, and a covering system that incorporates two domes supported by circular, high pulleys.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the field study findings, the Chrysaliniotissa Church, constructed in 1450, is situated within the historic urban texture of Nicosia. As the oldest dated Greek Orthodox Church within the Walled City of Nicosia, it originates from Cyprus's Lusignan period (1191–1489) and continues to serve its original religious function.

The church's original single-nave plan, characteristic of Byzantine Basilica typology, was modified into an irregular 'L' shape through the addition of a side nave to the north and an extension toward the south. A secondary apse was incorporated within the southern addition. Furthermore, the church diverges from other Greek Orthodox Churches due to the presence of an arched portico, later added along the west and south façades.

The Chrysaliniotissa Church, based on its construction date, distinguishes itself from other churches through its use of rubble and rough masonry stone materials, as well as its Gothic architectural elements characterised by pointed and semicircular arches.

The church's covering system, featuring high circular pulleys and stone vaults crowned by a dome, evokes the structural designs commonly seen in basilica covering systems. Additionally, the motif decorations on the church façades and the portico arches display ornamentation akin to that found in Byzantine Churches.

Although constructed during the Lusignan period, the Chrysaliniotissa Church exhibits architectural characteristics distinct from other Greek Orthodox Churches in Nicosia, particularly those built before the XXth century, incorporating unique Franco-Byzantine architectural elements. This church exemplifies the Lusignan period in Cypriot history through its preserved architectural identity, excluding later additions. This structure embodies the cultural heritage of the era and enhances the continuity of the Lusignan period, which played a foundational role in shaping the region's historical character. Additionally, the continuous use of this church for its original purpose since its construction underscores its significance in the preservation and sustainability of cultural heritage. These qualities make this church a vital component of Nicosia's cultural heritage within its historical urban texture. This urban texture, comprising numerous architectural artefacts linked to Cyprus's history, forms a rich historical mosaic that endures today. The meticulous preservation and transmission of this heritage to future generations will be essential to ensure sustainability. In particular, conserving the Chrysaliniotissa Church, with its unique features among Greek Orthodox Churches, will significantly enhance the sustainability of Nicosia's historical texture.

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