

CYPRUS

Case 1: The Venetian Walls of Nicosia

In Cyprus, ancient monuments are protected by the 1935 Antiquities' Law as amended over the years. Monuments are divided into Schedule A (the property of the State) and Schedule B (privately owned). The Venetian Walls of Nicosia, constructed in 1567 as a response to the threat of an imminent attack by the expanding Ottoman Empire, has been listed as a Schedule A monument since 1935 and constitutes not only a fine example of Renaissance military architecture but is also the monument/landmark of Nicosia city, the capital city of Cyprus.

Recently the Department of Antiquities, responsible for the protection, preservation and promotion of the ancient monuments of the island, was under criticism as it refused to give permission to the civic authorities that wished to construct a two-storey underground car park inside the moat. The Department of Antiquities argued against the construction of the car park, which would be an irreversible intervention within a vital part of the monument. In addition, it would have created a precedent that, once permitted, would almost certainly have led to uncontrolled and disastrous actions. In addition, within the framework of a long-term restoration and preservation programme that began in 1996, financed by the United Nations Office for Project Services and carried out by the Department of Antiquities, the Walls will be completely restored, studied and promoted in their context and with the retention of their current integrity.

During recent investigations of one of the bastions, a project never before undertaken, new information was retrieved regarding the original 16th-century siege levels of the city. In addition, an excavated section in the moat has indicated that the original height of the walls was an additional 3.6 metres of finely preserved stone wall with a sloping profile, extending below the present surface. A removal of these deposits will expose the walls to their original imposing height and would enhance the monument significantly,

particularly if all present obstacles – such as above-surface car parks – obscuring its structure are removed.

The civic authorities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Works and the Cyprus Technical Chamber, and insisting on carrying-through their plans, invited experts from Italy and Greece to advise on the possibility of implementing their project. Although the decision is still pending, it seems that the experts' reports have specified requirements that are difficult and costly to meet, thus deterring immediate implementation of the project.

Case 2: The Church of Thermia

The cultural heritage of the northern part of Cyprus, occupied by the Turkish army since 1974, is inaccessible to the Department of Antiquities. Many churches of Early Christian, Byzantine and mediaeval date and decorated with frescoes, mosaics and portable icons have been looted, their furnishings illegally sold on the antique market (see also *H@R Report 2000*); in one case the entire building was completely demolished. A very recent example of the way cultural heritage is managed in the occupied areas is the case of the church of Thermia. This is a remarkable monument with remains possibly dating to the Early Christian period within its extent, while remains that may date to the Bronze Age are found in the plot directly adjacent – which is to be used for the construction of a restaurant. The prospective developer also rented the adjoining abandoned church. One of the Turkish-Cypriot English newspapers reports that there is resentment among the people in the village, at least among the English inhabitants, as there are suspicions that the church might be used for commercial purposes.

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