



AYIOS NEOPHYTOS MONASTERY

A full-day excursion to Saint Neophytos monastery by Paphos will be organized exclusively for the Conference Delegates and accompanying persons. This will be performed with luxury fully insured air-conditioned coaches and the escort by qualified English-speaking guides. Excursion tickets will be provided by the EuroMed2014 Hospitality Desk to all registered participants when submitting the Registration Form. Moreover, excursion tickets will be available at the EuroMed2014 Hospitality Desk for all who may decide to join locally.

After breakfast, the delegates will embark on coaches and will ride to the historical City of Paphos, the capital of Cyprus during the Roman period from 58 BC to 330 AD. Drive through the evergreen PHASOURI plantations to the ancient Greco-Roman City kingdom of Curium where to visit the Amphitheatre, which is used to the present day for staging classical performances and concerts and the House of Eustolios, featuring a complex of baths and a number of rooms with beautiful 5th century AD mosaic floors.

The group will continue to the Saint Neophytos Monastery, which was founded towards the end of the twelfth century. The present building is situated on one side of a narrow gorge, the slopes of which are covered with groves of olives, cypresses, and other trees.

The church of the monastery is a large and well-built mediaeval edifice of three aisles. The barrel-vaulted roof is supported by columns, three on each side of the nave, crowned by capitals carved with curious thin acanthus leaves. The interior show considerable remains of mural painting of two periods: those in the apse date from the sixteenth century, while those on the vaulting of the north aisle are earlier. A portion of the iconostasis is seventeenth century, and contains a repainted icon of the Virgin of c.1620, with a kneeling donor priest, a certain Joachim.

In a glazed cupboard in the north wall are kept some old icons, the finest being two angels in carved frames after the Italian manner. These are probably the icons referred to by Hogarth: "On the seat was standing, when we visited the place, a small icon of an angel, painted on wood, certainly not in the usual Greek style, but strongly suggestive if Italian sixteenth century art; but whence it had come no monk could tell us".

Nearby is a large late seventeenth-century icon of the Dormition of the Virgin. In a wooden sarcophagus are kept the saint's bones, his skull is in a silver reliquary.

Above the west door of the church was an inscription giving the date and history of the church, but it was removed by the Abbot in 1878, who feared that the English were going to take over the building and use it for Protestant services.

Some hundred meters from the church are the three caves which formed the original dwelling-place of the saint, and are said to have been hewn by Neophytos himself from the rock. The first cave consists of a chapel, the rough-hewn walls covered with paintings of various periods. Some of these, notably the angels (on the roof), St. Constantine, and St. Helena, the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord, may be early thirteenth century, re-touched at a later date. The remaining fragments are dated 1503. The painting in the bema of St. Neophytos supported by angels is in the true Byzantine style. In the iconostasis screen are two late sixteenth century processional icons.



The next cave was the dwelling-place of the saint. In this tiny room eleven feet by eight, is his empty tomb cut in the recess of the rock. Into this still climb the sick, who turn round three times, in the hope of being cured. Here can be seen his rock-cut table, and his seat, above which there is a modern cupboard containing the skulls and bones of his earliest followers. On the wall above is a painting of Neophytos kneeling at the foot of

Christ, who is supported by the Madonna and St. John the Baptist.

The third of the caves is now disused, and its painted interior blackened and destroyed by fire. On the outside are the remains of a fourteenth-century doorway with chevron ornamentation.

St. Neophytos was born at Lefkara, near Amathus. At an early age he decided to become a monk, but his parents had other plans for their son, and chose a bride for him. Rather than to marry Neophytos ran away to the monastery of St. Chrysostomos, where he hid for three months till he was discovered and forced to return home. After much entreaty and argument he at last persuaded his parents to grant his dearest wish and to allow him to “embrace a monastic life rather than a bride”. He journeyed to Paphos and near there at last moved to a likely place of retreat:



The loneliness of the locality induced him, by its prospect of complete freedom from intrusion, to settle there for a while. It was on St. John Baptist’s Day (24th June), 1159, when twenty-five years of age, that he first took up his abode in the cave, and by the following September he had decided to remain. Immediately on coming to this

determination he commenced to enlarge his strange habitation, a work which he finished on 14th September of the following year. On its completion he dedicated the cave to the Holy Cross, and erected an altar within, as well as constructed a tomb for himself in its inner most recesses. There he continued to live in the strictest seclusion until the accession of Basil Kinnamos in 1166 to the See of Paphos. This prelate, who proved a warm friend and patron, after much entreaty persuaded him very reluctantly to enter the priesthood and to share his

solitude with a companion. From that time the place, which had hitherto remained tenantless, save for the dweller in the cave, began to be occupied by human habitations, until in 1183 all the buildings necessary to the reception of the new community were completed. As time went on the fame of the recluse near Paphos so extended that pilgrims flocked in crowds to the spot. Annoyed by the ever-increasing numbers of his admirers, whose attentions he found difficult to escape, he determined to leave the cell, which he had occupied for forty years, and with his own hands to construct higher up the cliff another retreat more inaccessible to the multitude.



Though now well advanced in years, he labored at the work with the same enthusiasm as he had shown when a young man. His life was in constant danger from falling rocks, which became detached during the course of the excavations, yet in spite of the entreaties of the brethren he refused to desist. At length his efforts were crowned with

success, and the new habitation, commenced on 24 June, 1199, was dedicated to St. John the Forerunner. His only means of communication now with the outer world was by a ladder, which was drawn up when not required. Here in this new retreat he continued to practice the most rigid austerities, only descending on Sundays for the instruction and exhortation of the disciples.