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The beginnings of Christianity in Cyprus. Religious and cultural aspects

The history of Christianity in Cyprus has a long and great tradition. Christian commitment was very strong in Cyprus from the very beginning. Its origins are linked to four important persons: the Apostles Paul, Barnabas and Mark, who came to the island at the beginning of their first missionary journey converting the people of Cyprus to Christianity and founding the Church of Cyprus, and St. Lazarus, who was a Bishop of Kition and for 30 years preached and converted the Gentiles in Cyprus. They were crucial figures in the development of Christianity on the island, but they were not the only ones. Early Christianity left behind some saints, like St. Auxibius, Bishop of Soli, Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, Spyridon, Bishop of Trimythous, monk Hilarion, and Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great. This long Christian tradition is reflected in modern life. When in June 2010 Pope Benedict XVI came to Cyprus, he was the first Pope to visit the Republic of Cyprus, and 'strong Christian heritage' of the island offers a strong support on the way to resolve the conflict between the Muslim and Christian communities on the island.

The paper aims at presenting the role played by the Apostles and saints in the history and culture of Cyprus. It will also outline the process of Christianization of the island and its most important stages. The history of early Christian Cyprus has already triggered a considerable number of scholarly works, and the authors who should be mentioned here

include: John Hackett,¹ Henry Thomas Forbes,² Otto Mainardus,³ Benedict Englezakis,⁴ and, in Poland, Marek Starowieyski,⁵ Mariusz Misztal⁶ and Zdzisław J. Kapera.⁷ Nevertheless, several problems still remain open for research, such as correct identification of the Proconsul of Cyprus who adopted Christianity at the time when St. Paul is supposed to have stayed on the island.⁸

Cyprus is inhabited by over one million people, about 800 thousand of whom live in the territory belonging to the Republic of Cyprus, while further 275 thousand in the territory belonging to the Northern Cyprus.⁹ The history of Cyprus is a complicated one, and its modern interpretation is heavily influenced by politics. From a geopolitical perspective, Cyprus is divided into four parts: the largest one is taken by the Republic of Cyprus; the second largest – the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, also called the Northern Cyprus, recognised only by Turkey; two sovereign British military bases on the Akrotiri Peninsula and in Dhekelia; and so called the 'Green Line', the United Nations Buffer Zone between the Republic of Cyprus and the occupied northern part of the island.¹⁰ Cyprus holds a special

1. J. Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus*, London 1901.
2. H. T. Forbes, *The Church of Cyprus*, Nicosia 2003.
3. O. Mainardus, *Relics in the Churches and Monasteries of Cyprus*, "Ostkirchliche Studien" vol. 19 (1970), pp. 19–43.
4. *Studies on the History of the Church in Cyprus, 4th–20th Centuries*, ed. by B. Englezakis, Aldershot 1995.
5. M. Starowieyski, *Św. Barnaba w historii i legendzie*, „Analecta Cracoviensia” t. 23 (1991), pp. 391–413.
6. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, Kraków 2013, pp. 84–97; M. Misztal, *Polityczna rola Kościoła prawosławnego na Cyprze w okresie turkokracji i na początku panowania brytyjskiego*, „Studia Środkowoeuropejskie i Bałkanistyczne” t. 24 (2016), p. 16.
7. Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e.–330 n.e.)*, in: *Cypr: dzieje, literatura, kultura*, red. M. Borowska, D. Maliszewski, P. Kordos, t. 1, Warszawa 2014, pp. 187–226.
8. D. A. Campbell, *Possible Attestation to Sergius Paul[us] (Acts 13:6–12), and the Implications for Pauline Chronology*, "Journal of Theological Studies" vol. 56 (2005), pp. 1–29; A. Weiß, *Sergius Paullus, Statthalter von Zypern*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik" Bd. 169 (2009), pp. 188–192; and articles written by Z. J. Kapera quoted in the later part of the paper. The issue of the identity of the Roman Proconsul of Cyprus Lucius (Quintus?) Sergius Paulus is still debatable, see literature listed.
9. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., pp. 12–14; Ł. Burkiewicz, *Kilka uwag do dyskusji nad przyszłością kultury cypryjskiej*, in: *Infiltracja kultur w dobie postępującej globalizacji*, red. A. B. Jagiełłowicz, A. Drohomirecki, t. 1, Wrocław 2016, p. 73.
10. A. Adamczyk, *Problem cypryjski – stanowisko Greków cypryjskich*, in: *Turcja i Europa. Wyzwania i szanse*, red. A. Szymański, Warszawa 2011, p. 132; M. Misztal,

position on a map of Europe due to its specific socio-political microsystem resulting from the division of the island, which, although not legally regulated, determines everyday lives of the inhabitants of the island who are divided linguistically, religiously, ethnically and culturally. The 'Green Line' which divides the island into two parts, marks the border between Turkish Cypriots living in the northern part, who are Muslims, and Greek Cypriots living in the south, who are members of the Eastern Orthodox Church.¹¹ Modern Cyprus is defined mainly by a multi-faceted and bloody (in the past) dispute between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots regarding the identity of the island, and both the Orthodox religion and Islam constitute the background of this conflict.

The first inhabitants of Cyprus came here about 6500 – 8000 years ago, according to one theory, from the Balkans, and were thus related to the ancestors of contemporary Greeks, or, according to another theory, directly from Anatolia, the cradle of contemporary Turks.¹² However, the latest archaeological discoveries have revealed the traces of the first humans on the island dating back to about 10,500 years ago.¹³ At that time the Cyprian civilization was created by the Eteocypriots, and was replaced by the Achaeans, whose appearance followed the decline of the Minoan civilization in the middle of the 15th century BC. The Achaeans, who spoke Greek, developed the Mycenaean civilization and dominated the eastern part of the Mediterranean region.¹⁴ Cyprus is situated at the crossroads of cultures

Historia Cypru, op. cit., p. 9; P. Osiewicz, *Pokojowa regulacja kwestii cypryjskiej. Aspekty prawne i polityczne*, Toruń 2008, pp. 8–9; P. Osiewicz, *Kwestia cypryjska: przebieg i konsekwencje rokowań w latach 2008–2012*, „Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej” nr 2 (2012), p. 108; P. Kordos, *Geografia, klimat i przyroda Cypru*, in: *Cypr: dzieje, literatura, kultura*, red. M. Borowska, D. Maliszewski, P. Kordos, t. 1, Warszawa 2014, p. 9.

11. R. Morphetou, P.T. Gibbs, *Marketing ethics: an Islamic and Christian. Comparison in Cyprus*, „International Journal of Management Cases” vol. 9 issue 3/4 (2007), p. 241.
12. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., pp. 15; H.D. Purcell, *Cyprus*, London 1969, pp. 74–75; V. Karageorghis, *Cyprus: from the Stone Age to the Romans*, London 1982, pp. 23–26; *Conclusions: Mylouthkia I and the Early Colonists of Cyprus*, in: *The Colonisation and Settlement of Cyprus. Investigations at Kissonerga-Mylouthkia, 1976–1996*, ed. by E. J. Peltenburg, Sävedalen 2003, pp. 83–103.
13. A. Ammerman, J.S. Nollet, *New Light on Aetokremnos*, „World Archaeology” vol. 37 (2005), pp. 533–534.
14. K. Nicolaou, *The First Mycenaean in Cyprus*, in: *Acts of the International Symposium “The Mycenaean in the Eastern Mediterranean”*, ed. by V. Karageorghis, Nicosia 1973, pp. 51–61.

and religions, and, due to its location and rich and turbulent history, lacks homogeneous cultural heritage. Yet, it can be claimed that the Greek left the longest lasting cultural heritage, which was reinforced by subsequent centuries by the spread of the Greek language and religion.¹⁵

The Etocypriots' beliefs were connected, at least to some extent, with copper mining. Cyprus was famous for this valuable natural resource, and sources from this period confirm divine patronage over copper processing. Additionally, an important part of the Etocypriots' life was the cult of fertility.¹⁶

Both the Etocypriots and later the Achaeans, who replaced them in Cyprus, did not know the idea of a temple as a monumental house of Gods, which was present in the Greek tradition. In Cyprus a usual place of cult was an open courtyard surrounded by a wall built of stone blocks. In its central point there was an altar with a cone made of white stone, which was believed to be the embodiment of a deity and anointed with oil and decorated with flowers during religious ceremonies.¹⁷

During the classical period (5th – 4th century BC) Cyprus was characterised by an unusual mosaic of ceremonies and coexistence of cultures with various deities and rituals, which was the legacy of the earlier periods strongly influenced (the island remained under control of various political powers) by the Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Persians. Interestingly, the periods of external dominance over Cyprus did not significantly influence religious beliefs of the inhabitants of the island, as both the Phoenicians and the Assyrians emphasised the similarities between their own religious beliefs and the beliefs of people from the areas they conquered and settled.¹⁸ Of course, the Greek culture and religion introduced by the Achaeans had the strongest impact on religious beliefs on the island, but in this period their four variants could be distinguished: local (Etocyprian), Greek, Egyptian and Oriental (Phoenician-Persian).¹⁹ However, the cult of

15. L. Steele, *Cyprus before History. From the Earliest Settlers to the End of the Bronze Age*, London 2004, pp. 190 – 191; Ł. Burkiewicz, *Kilka uwag o przyszłości zarządzania kulturą w kontekście Prezydencji Republiki Cypru w Radzie Unii Europejskiej (VII–XII 2012)*, „Perspektywy Kultury” t. 2/9 (2013), p. 92.

16. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., pp. 21, 33.

17. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., pp. 60 – 61; P. Dikaios, *A Conspectus of Architecture in Ancient Cyprus*, «Κυπριακαὶ Σπουδαί» vol. 24 (1960), pp. 3 – 30.

18. See: O. Masson, M. Sznycer, *Recherches sur les Phéniciens à Chypre*, Paris 1972.

19. S. Borowicz, *Cypr w okresie klasycznym*, in: *Cypr: dzieje...*, op. cit., pp. 102 – 104.

the 'Great Goddess' Wanassa dominated among this great diversity. She was the goddess of fertility, and, on the one hand, was identified with Aphrodite, and, on the other hand, with Phoenician Astatre and Sumerian Ish-tar. Not earlier than at the end of the 4th century BC she was named Aphrodite, and became the most characteristic, the oldest, and the longest lasting form of a religious cult in Cyprus. Aristophanes even called her 'The Lady of Cyprus'.²⁰

In Cyprus Aphrodite seemed close and familiar, because she combined two aspects: a Mother Goddess and a deity of blacksmithing.²¹ Homer claimed that Aphrodite was the daughter of Zeus and Dione, a deity of fresh water, but the inhabitants of Cyprus believed that she was created from the sea foam on the shore of the island near Petra tou Romiou, a sea stack, which is now considered one of the greatest tourist attractions in Cyprus.²²

Apart from Aphrodite, Cypriots also worshiped Athena, Hera, Persephone, Apollo, Zeus and Heracles, but Aphrodite was the most important goddess from the Greek pantheon for them.²³ The cult of Aphrodite became the symbol of the island and affected numerous aspects of its history, e.g. the myths connected with the origins of the royal rule in Cyprus were connected with Aphrodite. The first mythological lover and husband of the goddess was the future king of Paphos, and maybe even of Cyprus, hero Cinyras.²⁴ In the spring Cypriots held special celebrations devoted to Aphrodite and Adonis, during which separate groups of men and women adorned with flowers headed towards the temple of Aphrodite. Today the

20. S. Borowicz, *Cypr w okresie klasycznym...*, op. cit., p. 104.

21. J. Karageorghis, *Kypris. The Aphrodite of Cyprus. Ancient Sources and Archaeological Evidence*, Nicosia 2005; A. Kieburg, *Aphrodite, Hephaistos and Ares: some thoughts on the origins of the mythical connection of the three gods in the metallurgy of Late Bronze Age Cyprus*, in: *Island Dialogues. Cyprus in the Mediterranean Network*, ed. by A. P. McCarthy, Edinburgh 2006, pp. 210–231; V. Karageorghis, J. Karageorghis, *The Great Goddess of Cyprus or the Genesis of Aphrodite in Cyprus*, in: *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, ed. by S. Parpala, R. M. Whiting, Helsinki 2002, pp. 263–282.

22. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 62.

23. See: V. Karageorghis, *Greek Gods and Heroes in Ancient Cyprus*, Athens 1998, Commercial Bank of Greece; S. Sophocleous, *Atlas des représentations chypro-archaïques des divinités*, Göteborg 1985.

24. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 63; C. Baurain, *Kinyras. La Fin de l'Age du Bronze à Chypre et la tradition antique*, « Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique » vol. 104 (1980), pp. 277–308; C. Baurain, *Kinyras de Chypre, légende ou réalité historique*, « Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph » vol. 49 (1975–1976), pp. 521–540.

elements of these rituals are preserved in the Spring Flower Festival and during the Green Week festivities devoted to the Flood Festival.²⁵ What is more, almost till today in provincial areas of Cyprus people identified Aphrodite with Christian Mary and asked for Aphrodite-Mary's intercession. The cult of Aphrodite was so strong that in the later period, described below, when the Ptolemaic dynasty controlled Cyprus and attempted to create one religious cult common for both Egypt and the Greek world, the cult of Aphrodite spread in Egypt, while Egyptian gods (Serapis, Isis, Osiris) were not widely accepted in Cyprus.²⁶ An important dimension of religiosity which survived from the times of the Ptolemaic dynasty till the 3rd century was a federation of Cypriot towns, called Koinon (Ton) Kypriôn, whose task was to organize competitions, contests, festivals and other cultural events in order to maintain their own gods and temples. In the Roman period its head was the Cypriot Great Priest of Venerable God Caesar, and his duty was to take care of the cult of emperors, but, at the same time, old gods were also worshipped.²⁷

The death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) marked the beginning of the Hellenistic period of the Cypriot history. Then Cyprus passed on to Ptolemy I (323–283 BC), a Macedonian Greek general of Alexander the Great and one of three Diadochi who succeeded to his empire. Some decades ago it was suggested that the first Jews settled in Cyprus in the time of the reign of the Ptolemies in Cyprus (312–58 BC).²⁸ It is unclear when the first Jews arrived in Cyprus; according to some researches it probably happened after the Ptolemies's conquest of Jerusalem (circa 320 BC), but today we are able to date the first Jewish settlers as early as 4th century BC.²⁹ Then the incomers from Judea were listed in Kition during the Persian Achaemenid Empire period in the history of Cyprus.³⁰ At that time

25. J. Karageorghis, *Kypris. The Aphrodite of Cyprus*, op. cit., pp. 50–54.

26. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., pp. 64, 75–76; more on the Ptolemaic period in the history of Cyprus can be found in: *From Evagoras I to the Ptolemies. The Transition from the Classical to the Hellenistic Period in Cyprus*, ed. by P. Flourentzos, Nicosia 2007.

27. Z. J. Kaperka, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e.–330 n.e.)*, op. cit., p. 205.

28. S. Panteli, *Place of Refuge: A History of the Jews in Cyprus*, London 2003, pp. 16–17.

29. Z. J. Kaperka, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus before AD 70*, "Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia" vol. 7 (2009), p. 33.

30. M. Heltzer, *Epigraphic Evidence Concerning a Jewish Settlement in Kition (Larnaca, Cyprus) in the Achaemenid Period (IV cent. B.C.E.)*, "Aula Orientalis" vol. 7 (1989), pp. 189–206; S. Hadjisavvas, A. Dupont-Sommer, H. Lozachmeur, *Cinq steles*

Jews were probably responsible for the supply of wine used to make sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem.³¹

Cyprus became a Roman province in 58 BC. In the Roman period the island was inhabited by indigenous Cypriots, Greeks from Greece and Egypt, Phoenicians, and some Romans, although not many in comparison with other groups, and a relatively large community of Jews.³² Then, the number of Jews living on the island increased significantly in the time of Augustus (27 BC – 14 AD), when closer contacts with the Palestine immigration resulted in a considerable number of Jewish settlers. Cyprus first learned of the Gospel of Christ after the death of St. Stephen in 36 AD.³³ During the reign of Caligula (37–41), Jewish communities existed in every Cypriot town, and were especially numerous in Salamis and Paphos.³⁴

One of these Jews was Joseph who was born in Salamis in a rich family.³⁵ Thanks to his wealthy family, he could travel. During his visit to Jerusalem, he heard the teachings of St. Peter and decided to devote his life to the preaching of the Gospel. He sold his property and gave the proceeds to the Apostles in Jerusalem. Soon, he was given a new name, Barnabas, which means a 'son of encouragement'.³⁶ According to the tradition of the Eastern Church, he became one of seventy seven apostles.³⁷ Many facts from his life are obscure. It is said that, on the one hand, he was the founder of the Church in Cyprus, and, on the other hand, that he preached in Rome and Alexandria and was the Bishop of Milan. Allegedly, he was the author of the Letter to the Hebrews and an anonymous Letter in Greek called the

funéraires découvertes sur la site d'Ayios Georghios à Larnaka – Kition, Report of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus, 1984, pp. 101–106.

31. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, p. 84; E. Oberhummer, *Der Insel Cypern. Eine Landeskunde auf historischer Grundlage*, Bd. 1, München 1903, pp. 23–24.
32. Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e.–330 n.e.)*, op. cit., p. 210; Z. J. Kapera, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus before AD 70*, op. cit., p. 33.
33. Acts 11:19; G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus, vol. 1: To the Conquest by Richard Lion Heart*, Cambridge 1972, p. 247.
34. S. Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, op. cit., pp. 18–19.
35. M. Starowieyski, *Św. Barnaba w historii...*, op. cit., pp. 391–413; Z. J. Kapera, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus...*, op. cit., p. 38.
36. Acts 4:36: "There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas" (which means "son of encouragement"); F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, New York 1969, p. 233.
37. Euzebiusz z Cezarei, *Historia Kościoła*, przekł. A. Lisiecki, A. Caba, red. H. Pietras, (= „Źródła Myśli Teologicznej” t. 70), Kraków 2013.

letter of Barnabas. None of these hypotheses proved true, but his links with Cyprus are believed to be very strong.³⁸

The rate of conversion to Christianity in Antioch was rather high, and, after the news reached Jerusalem, Barnabas was dispatched to preach there.³⁹ Barnabas chose Saul of Tarsus to be his companion, and they spent a year in Antioch.⁴⁰ Encouraged by the success of their mission, Saul and Barnabas were sent to Cyprus. They were accompanied by Barnabas's cousin, John called Mark, one of the Evangelists.⁴¹

According to tradition Saul, Barnabas and Mark came to Cyprus in circa 37–45 AD to spread Christianity.⁴² Arriving in Salamis, the native city of Barnabas, they preached the Gospel in the synagogue, and then travelled across the island to Paphos.⁴³ In the Roman period Quintus (Lucius?) Sergius Paulus was a Proconsul of Cyprus, who, although still not conclusively identified, is believed to witness these events.⁴⁴

As mentioned before, at that time, Sergius Paulus was a Roman Proconsul of Cyprus.⁴⁵ He was interested in the Eastern cults because one of his courtiers was a magician named Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas, which means magos in Arabic.⁴⁶ Once Sergius Paulus wished to hear Saul and

38. G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., pp. 247–248; M. Starowieyski, *Datowanie aktów św. Barnaby (BGH 225; ClAp 385) i Panegiryku św. Barnaby (BGH 226; CPG 7400; ClAp 286)*, „Meander” t. 48 (1993), pp. 319–323.
39. Acts 11:20–11:22: “But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. In the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch”.
40. Acts 9:26–9:30.
41. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 85.
42. Act 15:2: “And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders”.
43. G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., p. 247; B. Englezakis, *Barnabas and Epiphanius the two pillars of the Church of Cyprus*, in: *Studies on the History of the Church in Cyprus, 4th–20th Centuries*, ed. by B. Englezakis, pp. 40–61; Z. J. Kapera, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus...*, op. cit., p. 37.
44. D. A. Campbell, *Possible Attestation to Sergius Paul[us]...* op. cit., pp. 1–29.
45. Z. J. Kapera, *Can We Identify the Antyhypathos Sergius Paulus (Acts 13,7)?*, in: *Hortus historiae. Księga pamiątkowa ku czci profesora Józefa Wolskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin*, Kraków 2010, red. E. Dąbrowa, M. Dzielska, M. Salamon, S. Sprawski, pp. 319–330.
46. Acts 13:04–13:12; T. B. Mitford, *The Inscriptions of Kourion*, Philadelphia 1971, pp. 271–272; G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 247; Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim...*, op. cit., p. 211.

Barnabas speak about Jesus, but Elymas dissuaded him from meeting the apostles. Because of Elymas's opposition, Saul claimed that God had decided to make him blind and a cloud of darkness immediately began blocking his sight.⁴⁷ After this event, Sergius Paulus was converted to Christianity and became the first Roman official who did it.⁴⁸ In the light of the latest research the meeting between Saul and Sergius Paulus took place in 37 AD.⁴⁹

Cypriot Jews were shocked by the fact that Sergius Paulus became the first high Roman official who adopted the new faith and that Cyprus became the first Roman province ruled by a Christian. After Sergius Paulus became a Christian, Saul took the name Paul, and this event undoubtedly increased the number of conversions in Cyprus, although even many years later, the vast majority of Jews living on the island were hostile to the Christians.⁵⁰

Their activity seriously disturbed the Jewish community. Initially, the Apostles taught the Jews only, but when they rejected them, they began to preach the Good News to the Gentiles. The Cypriot tradition maintains that under the pressure of outraged Jewish community, Paul was captured in Paphos and, after being tied to the whipping post, punished with 39 strokes of the whip. Paul's whipping post can still be seen in the ruins of the Christian basilica Agia Kyriaki.⁵¹

St. Mark was the first to leave Cyprus and return to Jerusalem,⁵² Paul and Barnabas sailed back to the mainland of Asia Minor, to Perge in Pamphylia the Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, then to Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia.⁵³ After several years Paul suggested to Barnabas that they should revisit all the cities where they had taught. He agreed but they quarrelled about

47. Acts 13:11: "And now listen — the hand of the Lord is against you, and you will be blind for a while, unable to see the sun. Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he went about groping for someone to lead him by the hand"; B. Bauer, *Christ and the Caesars. The Origin of Christianity from the Mythology of Rome and Greece*, Berlin 1877–1879, (reprint: 2015), p. 455.

48. Act 13:12: "When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord".

49. Z.J. Kapera, [Quintus] *Sergius Paul[us] proconsul Cypru (Dz 13,7)*, in: *Jak śmierć potężna jest miłość. Księga pamiątkowa ku czci Księdza Profesora Juliana Wazzechy SAC (1944–2009)*, ed. by W. Chrostowski, Ząbki 2009, pp. 166–197.

50. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 86.

51. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 85.

52. Act 13:13.

53. Z.J. Kapera, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus before AD 70*, op. cit., p. 38.

whether they should take John Mark with them. Paul's opinion of Mark was not as good as that of Barnabas.⁵⁴ Eventually, in 50 AD Barnabas went to Cyprus without Paul,⁵⁵ but with Mark.⁵⁶ Barnabas and Mark's second mission to Cyprus was not described in the Acts, but Apocryphal of Barnabas offers some information on it.⁵⁷

Although the date, place, and circumstances of his death are historically unverifiable, Christian tradition holds that Barnabas was martyred in Salamis, Cyprus, in AD 61. During his second visit to Cyprus Barnabas was captured by orthodox Jewish in Salamis and burned at the stake. The ashes of the apostle, ready to be thrown into the sea, were stolen by Mark and secretly buried in a cave.⁵⁸

According to tradition, the first bishop of Cyprus was St. Heraclides, who was converted by Paul and Barnabas. During Barnabas's second visit to Cyprus, he was anointed Bishop of Tamassos.⁵⁹ Shortly after his death, St. Auxibius, who was born at Rome in a rich family, arrived in Cyprus, and St. Mark baptized and established him bishop in the city of Soli. He remained in this position for 50 years.⁶⁰

One of the most important figures in the Cypriot church was St. Lazarus.⁶¹ According to tradition, Lazarus left Bethany in Palestine after his resurrection and came to Cyprus because of rumoured plots on his life.⁶² He went to Kition (Larnaca), where the inhabitants elected him the first Bishop of Kition, and for the next 30 years he preached and converted the

54. Act 15:38.

55. Paul never returned to Cyprus and never even mentioned that area in his letters. See: Z.J. Kapera, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus...*, op. cit., p. 38.

56. Act 15:36: "After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are going'".

57. *Acta Barnabae*, in: *Greek Texts of the Fourth to Thirteenth Centuries*, ed. by H. A. Pohlsander, "Sources for the History of Cyprus", vol. 7, Albany 1999; see: Z.J. Kapera, *The Jewish Presence in Cyprus...*, op. cit., p. 38; Z.J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim...* op. cit., p. 216.

58. C. P. Kyrris, *Saint Barnaba and Saint Paul in Cyprus*, in: *Praktika tou Pankypriou Synedriou Ellenikou Politismou "Ellenike Periodos"* (Leukosia, 21–23 Dekembriou 1973), Leukosia 1974, pp. 97–125.

59. F. Halkin, *Les actes apocryphes de Saint Héraclide de Chypre, disciple de l'apôtre Barnabé*, «Analecta Bollandiana» vol. 82 (1964), pp. 133–169.

60. M. Liśkiewicz, *Żywot św. Auxubiusza. Nieznany zabytek hagiografii greckiej VII wieku*, Białystok 2009.

61. H. Fos, F. Sowa, *Księga imion i świętych*, t. 3: H–L, Kraków 1997, pp. 660–670.

62. Jn 12:10–11.

Gentiles in this city.⁶³ He was buried there for the second and last time. In 890, his tomb, bearing the inscription 'Lazarus the friend of Christ', was found in Larnaca. Emperor Leo VI (886–912) had Lazarus's remains transferred to Constantinople in 898, and later, after the sack of Constantinople by the Franks in 1204, the Crusaders took the relics of Lazarus to Marseilles. In recompense to Larnaca, Leo VI built the Church of St. Lazarus (which is there till today) in the place of the former tomb of Lazarus.⁶⁴ On November 2, 1972, during the renovation of the church, under the main altar in the marble sarcophagus human remains were discovered and identified as part of the saint's relics. This can mean that not all remains were removed to Constantinople.⁶⁵

According to legend, the lake's saltiness stems from St. Lazarus' encounter with an old woman whom he asked for food and drink. While he was escaping from Palestine, hungry and thirsty, Lazarus asked the owner of a vineyard to let him have some bunches of grapes. She refused, saying that the vineyard withered and bore no fruit. Lazarus saw the fruit and decided to punish the liar by turning her vineyard into a salty lake.⁶⁶

The period of Jewish-Roman Wars was a significant period in the history of Cyprus and the development of Christianity. The wars were a series of revolts initiated by the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean area against the Roman Empire between 66 and 136 AD. When in 70 the Romans bloodily suppressed the uprising in Palestine, a large group of Jews moved to nearby Cyprus,⁶⁷ and contributed to the spread of the Jewish colonies along the east coast of the Mediterranean. However, the relations between the

63. A. W. Carr, *The "Holy Sepulcher" of St. John Lampadistes in Cyprus*, in: *New Jerusalem. Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces*, ed. by A. Lidov, Moscow 2009, p. 475.
64. J. Wortley, *Relics of the "Friends of Jesus" at Constantinople*, in: *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, ed. by J. Durand, B. Flusin, Paris 2004, pp. 153–157; V. von Falkenhäusen, *Bishops and Monks in the Hagiography of Byzantine Cyprus*, in: *Medieval Cyprus: studies in art, architecture, and history in memory of Doula Mouriki*, ed. by N. P. Sevchenko, New York 1999, pp. 20–23.
65. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 87.
66. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 87; *Francesco Suriano (1484)*, in: *Excerpta Cypria. Materials for a history of Cyprus*, transl. and trans. by C. D. Cobham, Cambridge 1908, p. 48.
67. Ł. Burkiewicz, *The Cypriot Jews under the Venetian Rule (1489–1571)*, „Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia” t. 6 (2008), p. 50. [reprint: Ł. Burkiewicz, *The Cypriot Jews under the Venetian Rule (1489–1571)*, “Επετηρίς της Κυπριακής Εταιρείας Ιστορικών Σπουδών” vol. 9 (2010), pp. 51–66].

inhabitants of these areas and the Jewish immigrants were characterized by numerous conflicts, also in Cyprus.⁶⁸

In 115 the Jewish revolt in Cyrenaica, Mesopotamia, Aegyptus and Cyprus spiralled out of control, resulting in a widespread slaughter of Roman citizens and others by the Jewish rebels (115–116).⁶⁹ The rebellions were finally crushed by the Roman legionary forces, but the damages suffered by Cyprus were more extensive than anywhere else. Salamis was completely ruined, and its non-Jewish population was murdered. As Cassius Dio, a Roman statesman and historian of the Greek origin, reported, before the summer of 116 about 240 thousand people died on the island.⁷⁰ According to him, one of the results of the Jewish revolt in Cyprus was a decree forbidding the settlement of Jews on the island and banishing all Jews from the island.⁷¹

It was not until the 12th century that Jews started to come to Cyprus again, and this process escalated with the beginning of the rule of the French dynasty of Lusignan (1192–1489).⁷² By the end of the 15th century large Jewish settlements existed in Nicosia, Famagusta and Paphos.⁷³ One of the earliest accounts concerning Cypriot Jews is "The Book of Travel", a report from 1159–1172 of a Spanish traveller Benjamin of Tudela.⁷⁴ During his stay in Cyprus he found settlements of Jews, who were considered heretics by their compatriots. Called by others 'Kaphrasin', that is, Cypriots, they profaned Saturday's Sabbath and celebrated it on Sunday. This departure from the orthodox tradition led to the contempt of orthodox Jews who

68. G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 241–243.

69. Z. J. Kapera, *Jewish Rebellion in Cyprus in 116/117 AD and Mesopotamia*, in: *Here & There. Across the Ancient Near East. Studies in Honour of Krystyna Lyczkowska*, ed. by ODrewnowska, Warszawa 2009, pp. 69–84.

70. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 89.

71. H. D. Purcell, *Cyprus*, op. cit., p. 104; Z. J. Kapera, *Jewish Rebellion...*, op. cit.,

72. T. M. Mitford, *New Inscriptions from Early Christian Cyprus*, "Byzantion" vol. 20 (1950), p. 111; G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 243.

73. *Chronique d'Amadi [Cronaca di Francesco Amadi]*, in: *Chroniques d'Amadi et de Strambaldi*, ed. by M. R. de Mas Latrie, vol. 1, Paris 1891–1893, p. 406; J. Starr, *Romania: The Jewries of the Levant after the Fourth Crusade*, Paris 1949, pp. 101, 103–104; C. Roth, *The Jews in Cyprus*, "Sefunot" vol. 8 (1964), pp. 238–294; B. Arbel, *The Jews in Cyprus: New Evidence from the Venetian Period*, in: *Cyprus, the Franks and Venice, 13th–16th Centuries*, Burlington 2000, ed. by B. Arbel, pp. 23–40; S. Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, op. cit., p. 58.

74. P. Johnson, *Historia Żydów*, Kraków 2000, pp. 173–175.

excluded them from their community.⁷⁵ 'Kaphrasin' were also mentioned by a Jewish theologian Abraham ibn Ezra, who visited the island before 1158.⁷⁶

No written sources referring to the development of Christianity on the island from the period between the mission of St. Barnabas and the 4th century are available, apart from several crypto-Christian inscriptions on the tombstones, whose exact dating is difficult to establish.⁷⁷ The failure of the Jewish revolt in 136 AD altered the Jewish diaspora. Rare but clear Christian inscriptions commemorated the origins of Christians.⁷⁸ Christianity enjoyed the greatest popularity among poor inhabitants of towns, while in the countryside to a much lesser extent.⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, the number and position of Cypriot Christians were strengthened by numerous Christian convicts from a mine in Palestine transferred to the island in 310. The Roman law also supported the spread of Christianity in Cyprus. In 311 Emperor Galerius issued the edict of toleration offering religious freedom to the Christians who lived in the Roman Empire.⁸⁰ In October 312 Emperor Constantine the Great beat his rival Maxentius in the Battle of the Milvan Bridge. According to tradition, before the battle Constantine had a dream in which he saw two crossed Greek letters in the sky: X (chi) and P (rho), which are called a Christogram, as they are the first letters of the name of Christ (In Greek: Χριστός), and heard a voice saying 'with this sign you will conquer'. Thanks to this victory, Constantine and Valerius Licinius became the rulers of Imperium Romanum.⁸¹ They met in Milan in 313 and the outcome of this meeting is erroneously called the Edict of Milan, while in fact it was the Imperial Rescript. Emperors Constantine the Great and

75. *Benjamin of Tudela (1170)*, in: *Excerpta Cypria. Materials for a history of Cyprus*, p. 5; G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 5; H. D. Purcell, *Cyprus*, op. cit., pp. 104–105; P. Johnson, *Historia Żydów*, op. cit., p. 174; S. Panteli, *Place of Refuge*, op. cit., pp. 39.

76. G. Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 5.

77. Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e.–330 n.e.)*, op. cit., p. 217.

78. T. B. Mitford, *The Inscriptions of Kourion*, op. cit., p. 294.

79. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 94.

80. J. R. Knipfing, *The Edict of Galerius (311 A.D.) re-considered*, «Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire» vol. 1/4 (1922), pp. 693–705; E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2, New York 1897 (reprint 2008), pp. 132–134; M. F. Baslez, *Prześladowania w starożytności. Ofiary, bohaterowie, męczennicy*, Kraków 2009, p. 377.

81. J. A. Ostrowski, *Rozwój i upadek Imperium Romanum*, in: *Wielka Historia Świata, t. 3: Świat okresu Cywilizacji Klasycznych*, red. P. Kaczanowski, A. Krawczuk, J. A. Ostrowski, J. Wolska-Leonarczyk, A. Zemanek, J. Żrałek, Kraków 2005, p. 418.

Licinius issued executive decrees to accompany the Edict of Emperor Galerius from 311 and sent them to provincial governors as circular letters. The decree from 313 for the first time openly acknowledged a legal entity of all Christians in the Roman Empire.⁸² Another step strengthening Christianity was taken in 380 by Theodosius the Great, who issued the decree 'Cunctos populos', the so-called 'Edict of Thessalonica', under which heresy became a crime persecuted by the state. Although this decree was directed only at inhabitants of Constantinople, it became a turning point in the history of Christianity.⁸³ A year later Theodosius recognised the Catholic Church as the official pillar of the state.⁸⁴ However, the process of Christianization did not end with the reign of Theodosius. It was a very long process that lasted in some parts of empire until 7th or even 10th century. At that time pagans and Christians occupied the municipal offices, and the first ones dominated in the imperial offices until the middle of 5th century, sometimes as crypto-pagans. Moreover the Christianity was not free from internal differences and divisions which had its consequences in the later centuries.

At the beginning the most important bishopric on the island was Paphos, due to its links with the Apostles' missions, but at the end of the 4th century Salamis – Constantia became a metropolis and its Bishop – whatever his formal title – became the Head of the Church on the island.⁸⁵

Several important figures from the period of early Christianity in Cyprus should be mentioned here. St. Spyridon of Trimythous was one of the representatives of Cyprus at the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.⁸⁶ Another historical figure was St. Hilarion, the founder of the Palestinian monasticism, who lived during the reign of Constantine the Great. St. Epiphanius of Salamis was an important person in the development of Christianity in Cyprus.⁸⁷ He came from a Jewish family living in Palestine and most

82. M.F. Baslez, *Prześladowania w starożytności...*, op. cit., p. 379.

83. R. L. Wilken, *The Jews and Christian Apologetics After Theodosius I Cunctos Populos*, "Harvard Theological Review" vol. 73/3–4 (1980), p. 452; G. Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service*, Eugene 2012, p. 198.

84. J.A. Ostrowski, *Rozwój i upadek Imperium Romanum*, op. cit., p. 430; G. Ostrogorski, *Dzieje Bizancjum*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 91–92.

85. M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., p. 97.

86. *La légende de S. Spyridon évêque de Tremithonte*, ed. by P. van den Ven, Louvain 1983.

87. B. Englezakis, *Epiphanius of Salamis, the Father of the Cypriot Autocephaly*, in: *Studies on the History of the Church of Cyprus...*, op. cit., pp. 32–37.

probably came to the island with his teacher Hilarion.⁸⁸ In 368 he became the Archbishop of Salamis and began his fight with heresy, which earned him a lot of enemies.⁸⁹ Several centuries later his remains were transferred to Constantinople by Emperor Leo VI.⁹⁰ St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, was another significant figure in the Cypriot history. In 327 she came back from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where she allegedly discovered the Holy Cross used at the crucifixion of Jesus, whose fragments she took with her.⁹¹ According to the Byzantine tradition, Helena was responsible for a large population of cats in Cyprus. Local tradition holds that she brought hundreds of cats from Egypt or Palestine in the 4th century to help rid a monastery of snakes. Other saints who were honoured on the island were St. Ariston, Bishop of Arsinoe, St. Aristobulus, brother of St. Barnabas and St. Mnason, Bishop of Tamassos.⁹²

The ongoing collapse of the Roman Empire and simultaneous spread of Christianity, which 'attacked' old religions, led to the situation in which Cypriot Koinon Kyprion, the guardian of the old order, was perceived as an anachronistic organization of priests and wealthy merchants operating on the basis of the cult of old gods. Nothing could stop the spread of the new religion in Cyprus.⁹³

The Cypriot church emerged from its dark period (2th—3th century) during the First Council of Nicaea in 325, in which at least three Cypriot bishops were present: Gelasius of Salamina, Cyril of Paphos and St. Spyridon, Bishop of Trimythous.⁹⁴ Later, twelve Cypriot bishops took part in the Council of Sardica in 344. In 431 at the Council of Ephesus The Cypriot Church obtained the right to make independent and autonomous decisions

88. C. Rapp, *Epiphanius of Salamis: The Church Father as Saint*, in: *The Sweet Land of Cyprus*, Birmingham 1991, pp. 169—187.

89. B. Englezakis, *Epiphanius of Salamis...*, op. cit., pp. 30—34.

90. J. Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church*, op. cit., p. 406; T. B. Mitford, *Roman Cyprus*, in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, ed. by H. Temporini, Berlin 1980, p. 1382.

91. L. Machairas [Macheras], *Recital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus entitled "Chronicle"*, ed. and trans. by R. M. Dawkins, vol. 1, Oxford 1932, §5—8; J. Hackett, *A History of the Orthodox Church*, op. cit., pp. 439—451; J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta, The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross*, Leiden 1992, pp. 84—129.

92. Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e. — 330 n.e.)*, op. cit., p. 216.

93. Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e. — 330 n.e.)*, op. cit., p. 205.

94. Z. J. Kapera, *Cypr w okresie rzymskim (30 p.n.e. — 330 n.e.)*, op. cit., p. 217.

connected with electing archbishops. The Council ratified the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus by its 8th canon. This independence was threatened when the Archbishop of Antioch tried to abolish the Church of Cyprus' autocephaly, but the Cypriot clergy denounced this before the Council of Ephesus. During the reign of Emperor Zeno (474–491), the patriarch of Antioch Peter the Fuller rejected the decisions of the Council of Ephesus and tried to revive the claim of the see of Antioch to the obedience of Cyprus. At the same time the archbishop Anthemius of Cyprus, following a vision, found the grave of Barnabas, his relics and a copy of the Gospel of Matthew. In that way Anthemius found an argument on its own behalf. Zeno confirmed the status of the Church of Cyprus.⁹⁵

The ancient history of Cyprus and its apostolic tradition had an epilogue. In June 2010, Pope Benedict XVI came to visit Cyprus. It was the first Pope to visit the Republic of Cyprus, and his visit was a highly significant event not only for the Catholics, but also for the Orthodox Cypriots for whom the words of the Holy Father about 'strong Christian heritage' of the island offered strong support on the way to resolve the conflict between the Turkish and Greek communities on the island. A large part of the heritage of the Christian culture lies in the zone occupied by the Turkish army. Before the agreement between the Greeks and the Turks is reached, Cypriot wealth, which is precious for the whole Christian world, will remain unattainable. That is why the modern Catholic Church in Cyprus faces the same challenges as the Orthodox community, which are directly connected with the political problems of the island and its region, the main of them being a peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims.

95. M. Misztal, *Polityczna rola Kościoła prawosławnego*, op. cit., p. 16; M. Misztal, *Historia Cypru*, op. cit., pp. 95–97.

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Abstract

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The beginnings of Christianity in Cyprus.

Religious and cultural aspects

The history of Christianity in Cyprus has a long and beautiful tradition, whose beginnings are connected with four important figures: Saint Lazarus and apostles Paul, Barnabas and Mark. The apostles came to Cyprus in the first half of the 1st century, when the island was under the Roman rule. According to tradition, by preaching God's Word they became the founders of the Cypriot Church. Their mission was not an easy one, and the pressure of the indignant Jewish community led to the capture of Paul in Paphos and his consequent whipping at the whipping post. The post can still be seen today among the ruins of the church of Agia Kyriaki *Chrysopolitissa*. Barnabas sacrificed his life for his faith: he was captured in Salamis, and then burnt at the stake by a Jewish mob. Roman Proconsul Quintus Sergius Paulus became the first important Roman official who converted to Christianity, and Cyprus became the first Roman province which adopted Christianity. Tradition also links Saint Lazarus with the island: allegedly, after being miraculously resurrected by Jesus in Bethany, he came to Cyprus, where he became a bishop and where he preached God's Word and converted pagans into Christianity for the next 30 years.

Keywords:

St. Barnabas,
St. Paul,
St. Lazarus,
St. Mark, Cyprus,
Christianity,
apostles.

Abstrakt

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*Początki chrześcijaństwa na Cyprze. Religijne
i kulturalne aspekty*

Słowa kluczowe:

św. Barnaba,
św. Paweł z Tarsu,
św. Łazarz,
św. Marek, Cypr,
chrześcijaństwo,
apostołowie.

Historia chrześcijaństwa na Cyprze posiada długą i piękną tradycję, a jej początki są związane z czterema ważnymi dla Kościoła postaciami: św. Łazarzem oraz apostołami Pawłem, Barnabą oraz Markiem. W pierwszej połowie I wieku n.e. na pozostający pod panowaniem rzymskim Cypr przybyli apostołowie Paweł, Barnaba i Marek. Głosząc Słowo Boże stali się, w myśl tradycji, założycielami Kościoła cypryjskiego. Misja ta nie była łatwa, a presja oburzonej gminy żydowskiej spowodowała, że Paweł został pojmany w Pafos, ukarany biczowaniem i przywiązany do pręgierza, który do dzisiaj można oglądać wśród ruin bazyliki Agia Kyriaki *Chrysopolitissa*. Barnaba poświęcił swoje życie. Został pojmany w Salamis, a następnie spalony na stosie przez żydowski tłum. Tradycja z wyspą łączy również św. Łazarza, który po cudownym wskrzeszeniu przez Jezusa w Betanii, przybył na Cypr głosić Słowo Boże. Okoliczni mieszkańcy obrali go biskupem i przez następne 30 lat nauczał i nawracał pogan na chrześcijaństwo.