

# SAINT CATHERINA, THE CYPRIOT SAINT, WHO WAS LOST IN THE DEPTHS OF THE HISTORY

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## Abstract

Although Apostle Andreas was born in Cyprus only a few of the Saints of the Christian faith was born in the island of Cyprus. The most legendary and eminent one is Saint Catherina, who is the beloved Saint of most of the Orthodox Christians living in Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Syria and Lebanon.

Saint Catherina is still the most celebrated Saint of the young girls and women of these countries and the popular one among the other Saints. Most of them have her picture displayed in their room or carry it in a holy pendant.

Who is Saint Catherina, where was she born, where did she live and what is special about her. To find out these answers a travel in the depths of the history is essential.

Travellers of the Middle Age, Nicolai de Marthono<sup>1</sup>, John Capgrave<sup>2</sup>, Franciscan frate R. P. Noe<sup>3</sup>, Christophori Fürer<sup>4</sup>, Ludolf Von Suchen<sup>5</sup>, and passed by Cyprus during their pilgrimage to the holy land and mentioned about the birth place of Saint Catherina, her betrothal with Jesus Christ, the place she was imprisoned and about her glorious martyrdom in their journals.

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## Introduction

Although St Catherina is widely known as a Saint, very few people knows that she is the virtual fiancé of Lord Jesus Christ and her betrothal took place in an island, situated on the shores of town of Famagusta<sup>6</sup>, Cyprus.

The island still exists, and defined as “Two bowshots distance from the town” in those days. It is now an isle rather than an island and connected to the shore by a tiny passage of around 4.00 m. in width.

This kind legends or beliefs do not exist anymore. Most of the Christian faith believers of the island do not believe in such miracles or religious stories any more. They do not believe that St. Helena found the timbers of the Cross where Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on during her visit to this Holy Town of Jerusalem after almost 300 years. So as to the virtual engagement of St. Catherina with Lord Jesus Christ by an Angel as the spouse of Him.

This paper aims to dig out the foundations of this betrothal by investigating the manuscripts written by the travellers who passed by Cyprus during the Medieval years.



Figure 1: Saint  
Catherina

## MARTHONO

“Revue de l’Orient Latin, 1895”

Mağusa Yazıları, Page 20[1]

Excerpta Cypria, Page 22[2]

A notary of Carinola, near Calvi in Campania, embarked at Gaeta June 17, 1394 for Alexandria. Visited Cairo, M. Sinai and Jerusalem, and on November 27, 1394 arrived at port of Famagusta, Cyprus.

The paragraphs taken from his manuscript tells about the locations where St. Catherine was born, betrothed and lived.



Figure 2:  
Port of Famagusta and island of Saint Catherine

### Of the place where S. Catherine was born.

“... And because through the grace of our Lord -Jesus Christ Who permitted me to do so I saw all the story of the blessed Catherine, and all that she did, as well in Alexandria, the place of her prison and the glorious martyrdom which she endured in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ on the wheel between those two columns, as in her church, where her glorious body was placed by the holy angels on the summit of that great mountain, and then her holy body which was translated from that lofty mountain to her own church of S. Catherine, I desired also to see the place of her nativity; wherefore on the fifth day of December of the third indiction<sup>7</sup> I went to that ancient city Constantia four miles distant from Famagosta, which was once a great city built by the Emperor Constantius, father of the blessed Catherine, but now is utterly destroyed, and went to the place where one can see the castle of the city stood, which seems to have been of great size, and there directly is that room, now destroyed, where the blessed Catherine was born: near it now stands a seemly chapel, to which the people of Famagosta go with great devoutness and frequency.

### Of the place where the blessed Catherine was betrothed by an angel as the spouse of Christ.

Concerning the blessed Catherine I was told in that city of Famagosta a story (I cannot just now remember if it is contained in her Legend) how, when she was grown up and the fairest and wisest of women, her father and mother sought to give her in marriage, and the Saint who was rapt in divine love said thus:

**-"I will not accept a husband unless I find one as fair and wise and rich as I am."**

At last the Empress, S. Catherine's mother, seeing this to be her daughter's will, said,

**- "Thou seekest, my child, one of whom I cannot tell you, a man as fair and wise and rich as thou art. In an island in the sea not far hence is a hermit who serves God, go to him and ask him about a husband dowered with rank, beauty and wealth even, as thou art."**

S. Catherine replied, **"I am ready"** and went to that hermit, and asked him about taking such a husband.

He said to her,  
-**"I cannot tell you about taking a husband, except One who is wise and learned, fair and rich as you desire."**

Saint Catherine said,  
-**" Who is he of whom you speak ?"**

The hermit said,  
-**" It is our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Then said S. Catherine,  
-**"And I desire Him for my spouse and lord, and to serve only Him."**

And as she stood there an angel of the Lord came down by night from heaven, and on behalf of our Lord Jesus Christ betrothed her with a ring, and received her for the bride of Christ.

And so it was on the sixth of that month of December I went myself to the said island where S. Catherine was betrothed to Christ by the angel, which island is about two bowshots distant from Famagosta, and near the harbour. The island is about one modius<sup>8</sup> (1066.67 yards) large, and therein is a church dedicated to S. Catherine, very seemly..."

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**FRA. R. P. NOE**

**"Viaggio da Venetia al S. Sepolcro, et al Monte Sinai.."**

Mağusa Yazıları, Page 36 [1]

Milat Öncesinden Günümüze Kıbrıs Tarihi Üzerine Belgeler, Vol.1, Page 402 [3]

R. P. Noe, a Franciscan frate visited the island of Cyprus on his return from his pilgrimage to the holy land around the end of the XVth century.

The paragraphs taken from his manuscript tells about spot where St. Catherine was beheaded.

"... How we left Egypt...and arrived in no long time at the island of Cyprus, at the city of Famagosta, a seaport. I left that city and went by land to the place where king Costa once lived, who was father to the holy virgin Catherine. The place is called Salamina, and the city Constantia, but the city is quite destroyed, yet one may see the walls of the castle in which king Costa lived.

Where S. Catherine was born is a little church outside the city in the hands of the Greeks. There is a little chapel to mark the spot where S. Catherine was beheaded and the Apostle Barnabas..."



**Figure 3: Blessed Catherine betrothed by an angel as the spouse of Christ**



**Figure 4: The prison where St. Catherine locked in**

## JOHN CAPGRAVE

### “Chronicle of England”

Excerpts on Cyprus, Page 119[4]

Milat Öncesinden Günümüze Kıbrıs Tarihi Üzerine Belgeler, Vol.1, Page 190 [3]

He visited Cyprus in the year 1464 and was the Provincia of the Augustian order in England and probably at Lynn, his birthplace. He is known as one of the learned man of his age bearing the title D.D. of Oxford. His works of which 46 are known are mainly of theological nature<sup>9</sup>.

Of his historical ones, the most important is the “Chronicle of England”, from the Creation to A.D. 1417, written in English. Two copies of the Manuscript of this work are known to exist.

The appendices of the said publication include the Prologue of the Life of St. Katherine. As both the Prologue and the Life proper contain allusions to Cyprus, it would be worth while to take note thereof.

The Prologue furnishes the scholars with the interesting allegation that the original of this Life of St. Katherine, written in Greek was found by a knight, Amylion Fitz Amarak, in Cyprus, during the reign of King Peter I, and re-discovered by an English priest called Arrek, a native, like John Capgrave of Lynn. And for a long while, parson of St. Pancras, London.

Extracts from Capgrave’s “Prologue” to the metrical life of St. Katherine, clearly defines her refusals to all kinds of proposals coming from the Kings, Lords and Barons around and of various countries.

She never marries and devotes herself to Lord Jesus Christ, believing she virtually betrothed with him by an angel as the spouse of Him.

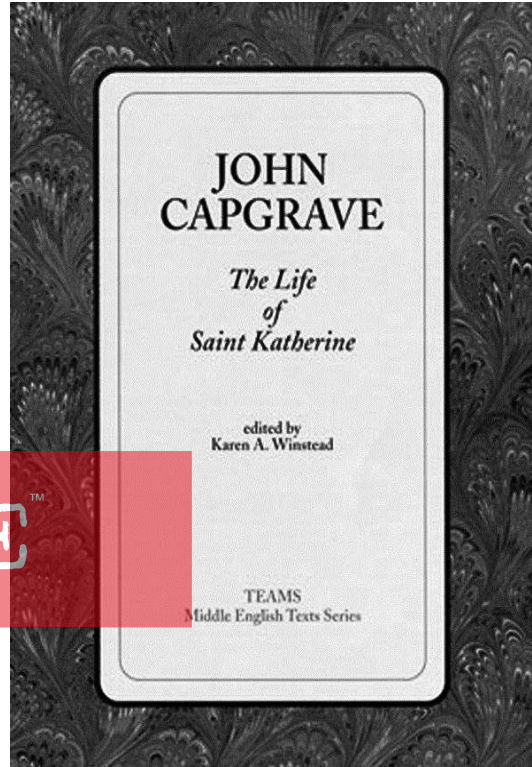


Figure 5: The front cover of the Capgrave’s book titled “The Life of Saint Katherine”

## FÜRER

### “Christophori Füreri ab Haimendorf, Equitis Aurati & c... Itinerarium”, 1621

Mağusa Yazıları, Page 54[1]

Excerpta Cypria, Page 77[2]

Milat Öncesinden Günümüze Kıbrıs Tarihi Üzerine Belgeler, Vol.2, Page 46 [5]



Christophori Fürer, a man of distinguished lineage and some learning, was born at Nürnberg in 1541, began his travels at 21, and died in 1610. His visit to Cyprus extended from March 29 to May 7, 1566.

The paragraphs taken from his manuscript tells about spot where St. Catherine was imprisoned.

"...Not far from the city is the site of old Famagusta or Salamin, in which Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some of its ruins can still be seen, as well as a church with the subterranean prison of S. Catherine, which seems to be cut out of the rock. Justin writes thus of Salamis..."

The location of the island where the betrothal took place mentioned in the journals, is situated on the eastern side of the naval port of navy, south of the conventional port of the town of Famagusta, located on the east part of the island. Now the only building exists on it is the headquarters of the Navy Foundation which was the Pilot's house of pre 1974 era<sup>10</sup>.

The above mentioned island is exactly the same island where St. Catherina was betrothed to Christ. It's location satisfies the distance mentioned in the memoirs of Nicolai de Marthoni as "**island is about two bowshots distant from Famagosta, and near the harbour.**". The church built on the island devoted to St. Catherina, was most probably knocked down by the earthquakes took place during the past two millennium<sup>11</sup>.

The outlook of the church most probably resembled the architecture of Byzantium and Syrian church styles.

The church likelihood had a dome made of brick sized cut stones, of a rectangular shape forming the bay of nave where apse wasn't in use yet, bell tower, two entrance doors, one for the monks and the other for the believers, tall and narrow pointed windows allowing only the sun rays in, oil lamps mounted on the inner side of the walls, a rostrum in a very simple form and some icons of mainly St. Catherinas'.

The prison mentioned in the memoirs is located on the left side of the road leading to the Monastery of St. Barnabas, 1 km. after turning left from the 7<sup>th</sup> kilometer of the main carriage way from Famagusta to Karpaz. It is very closely located to the main road and encarved in a stone with a semi cylindric dome. There are no written record to prove a St. Catherina was ever imprisoned here. However there might be a small element of truth in the story. From the figure it is an obvious deduction that it was an ancient Greek Orthodox chapel. According to the records, it was in use as late as 1950 A.D. The walls below the entrance composed of very large stones and at first a Roman tomb of the Augustine period was revealed. It is estimated that this building was first erected around 700 B.C.



**Figure 6: Church of St. Catherine  
(Drawn by the author, based on the  
Architecture of the churches of**

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Notary of Carinola, near Calvi in Campania, lived in the 14th & 15th Century.  
C.D.Cobham, EXCERPTA CYPRIA, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1908, Page 22
- <sup>2</sup> A. Atun, *MİLAT ÖNCESİNDEN GÜNÜMÜZE KIBRIS TARİHİ ÜZERİNE BELGELER*, Özyay Matbaası, Lefkoşa, KKTC, 2005, P.190, 191, 192, 195, 197, 199, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 207, 208
- <sup>3</sup> C.D.Cobham, EXCERPTA CYPRIA, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1908, Page 53
- <sup>4</sup> C.D.Cobham, EXCERPTA CYPRIA, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1908, Page 78
- <sup>5</sup> C.D.Cobham, EXCERPTA CYPRIA, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1908, Page 20
- <sup>6</sup> Famagusta is the main port of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, situated at the eastern coast of island of Cyprus.
- <sup>7</sup> Third indiction : Fiscal period of 15 years instituted in A.D. 313 by Constantine and reckoned from A.D. 312  
Oxford encyclopedic dictionary, P.858
- <sup>8</sup> Modius : 976 metres.
- <sup>9</sup> Excerpts on Cyprus, Pusey press, Nicosia, 1941, Page 119
- <sup>10</sup> Defined by the author, who is the native of the town of Famagusta.
- <sup>11</sup> Based on the legends of the town, told to the author by the elderly citizens

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- [7] HILL, Sir George: A History of Cyprus (4 Cilt), (Cambridge) 1940-1952
- [8] GUNNIS, R.: Historic Cyprus, (Cyprus) 1936, 1956, 1973

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