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Of relics and kings: Cyprus in Franciscan apocrypha of the Trecento

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ABSTRACT

What sacred objects did the Lusignan kings of Cyprus treasure in their collection of holy items? Certainly, they had fragments of the Holy Cross and saints' skulls, but what about Passion relics such as the *titulus* placed above the crucified Christ, or the white rock to which the cross was affixed? This study explores overlooked fourteenth-century Franciscan apocryphal stories about the life of Christ and didactic narratives which, among other things, cite Passion relics and their respective proprietors. In the following essay, I will turn attention to relics which, according to these texts, were in the safe-keeping of the kings of Cyprus. In addition to evaluating the reliability of such evidence, I will discuss the nature of the relics, identify the mysterious relic-hoarder king, and seek to uncover a representation of such a relic in the 'Royal Chapel' at Pyrga, Larnaca.

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In 1243, the controversial Minorite friar, Elias of Cortona (c.1170/80–1253), formerly minister general of the Franciscan Order, and responsible for the construction works in San Francesco in Assisi, was sent by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250) on a diplomatic mission to the East.¹ On that undertaking, Elias had to resolve a disagreement between John III Ducas Vatatzes (c.1193–1254), the Byzantine emperor of Nicaea, and Baldwin II (1217–73), the Latin emperor of Constantinople, and possibly arrange the wedding of the Greek emperor with Frederick's daughter, Costanza (Anna).² On that journey, Elias also conferred with the king of Cyprus, Henry I Lusignan (1217–53), while both Vatatzes and Henry offered Elias precious gifts, which

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

¹ The following abbreviation is used in this paper: ASC: Assisi, Archivio del Sacro Convento. Elias was minister general of the Order from around 1232 to 1239, until he was removed from office and then excommunicated in 1244, because of his dispute with the papacy. For Elias' life and deeds, see Silvana Vecchio, 'Elia d'Assisi', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 42 (1993): 450–8. For his commissions in Assisi, and his collaboration with Giunta Pisano, see Donal Cooper and Janet E. Robson, *The Making of Assisi: The Pope, the Franciscans and the Painting of the Basilica* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 63–72.

² Vecchio, 'Elia d'Assisi', 453–4; Giulia Barone, 'Frate Elia dalla Siria a Cortona', in *Frate Elia, il primo francescano-simo e l'oriente*, ed. Gabriel Marius Caliman (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2019), 1–15 (12); Marco Flamini, 'In margine alla stauroteca bizantina di Cortona, con un'Appendice di Gianfranco Fiacadori, Εὐήμη', *La Parola del Passato* 67, fascicolo 4, iss. 385 (2012): 279–314.

he subsequently donated to the Church of San Francesco in Cortona, Tuscany.³ From Vatatzes, we know that Elias received a precious tenth-century ivory reliquary, which contained a relic of the True Cross but, regrettably, sources do not expound on the gifts given to Elias by Henry I of Cyprus.⁴ For all the uncertainty surrounding the presents Henry I Lusignan showered upon Elias, it seems that, in certain Franciscan circles, the kings of Cyprus were famous for the relics of the Passion of Christ kept in their collection of sacred objects.

This essay investigates hitherto untapped didactic and apocryphal stories about the life of Christ and beyond, which among other things, include tangential references to Cyprus. Such tales were familiar to the Franciscans of central and northern Italy and were perhaps products of the excitement felt by Western Europe about the Holy Land and the Latin Kingdoms in the Levant. Here, I will concentrate on two early fourteenth-century textual sources that include apocryphal narratives about the Passion of Christ, and marginal references to Passion relics. I will focus on the relics which, as stated by these texts, were in the custody of the kings of Cyprus and attempt to trace allusions to one of these relics in the frescoes of the 'Royal Chapel' at Pyrga. The sources that will be appraised emerge as more significant than other textual documentation of holy artefacts in Cyprus, because not only are they virtually the earliest records of Passion relics preserved there, but they also specify relics other than those of the cross at Stavrovouni, the most commonly referred to among Cypriot holy items. Moreover, the Franciscan apocrypha afford us a fascinating glimpse of so far unknown relics that were part of the assemblage of *reliquiae* belonging to the kings of Cyprus.

Franciscan imaginations of the Passion: the *Exempla aliqua notabilia* and *Notabilia de passione Christi*

The first text I will discuss is found in MS 442, held in the Archivio del Sacro Convento in Assisi. The manuscript, which entered the Sacro Convento in around 1381, comprises a remarkable compendium of anecdotes and vivid narratives that were written by different hands between the early and late fourteenth centuries.⁵ Among the contents of the manuscript is a work entitled *Exempla aliqua notabilia* (folios 139r–147v), an opus that, among other stories, imaginatively embellishes the story of the Passion of Christ in relation to the canonical Gospels, by providing edifying tales. Its author, according to Ferdinand-Marie Delorme, was a Franciscan friar named Francis, who composed his text between 1317 and 1323, perhaps in Florence.⁶ On folio 142v a marginal insertion

³ Niccolò Papini, *Notizie sicure della morte, sepoltura, canonizzazione e traslazione di S. Francesco d'Assisi e del ritrovamento del di lui corpo. Raccolte e compilate da un religioso minor conventuale presso alla tomba del suo gran padre* (Fuligno: Tomassini, 1824), 53. For the diplomatic mission of Elias to the king of Cyprus, see Jean Louis Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles and H. de Albertis de Luynes, eds., *Historia diplomatica Friderici secundi sive constitutiones, privilegia, mandata, instrumenta quae supersunt istius imperatoris et filiorum ejus. Accedunt epistolae paparum et documenta varia*, vol. 6, part 1 (Paris: Henricus Plon, 1860), 147–8.

⁴ Barone, 'Frate Elia', 13–15. Others, however, consider the reliquary to be a gift to Elias by Baldwin II when he was in Constantinople. See Flamini, 'In margine alla stauroteca', 282.

⁵ The manuscript comprises 216 paper leaves and, besides the *Exempla aliqua notabilia*, other *exempla* by a certain Petrus Teutonicus are contained in the volume, along with a Latin vocabulary and lives of saints. For further details on the content of this manuscript, see Marvin L. Colker, 'A Collection of Stories in a Codex of Assisi', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 10 (2000): 176–238 (186).

⁶ The collection of the *Exempla* has been dated by Delorme to soon after Louis of Toulouse's canonisation (1317) – since the feast of St Louis IX of France is said to be celebrated in the octave of St Louis of Toulouse, which means that

alludes to a relic of the True Cross owned by the king of Cyprus. The note occupies the upper margin of the folio and provides commentary in the lower marginalia, the latter with particulars of the crosses of the two thieves crucified with Christ, based on the description of a certain Master Isaac (Figure 1).⁷ Master Isaac was a Jewish physician, who converted to Christianity and spoke on many occasions about Jesus, deploying Hebrew sources. Isaac lived in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and, apparently, travelled widely in the then known world, preaching his stories. At the end of his life, Isaac became a Carthusian monk and took the name Martin; yet the many references to Isaac made by the Franciscan apocrypha demonstrate that he had close relations with the Franciscans before he assumed the Carthusian habit.⁸

The upper marginalia on folio 142v feature two sketches of crosses and a text between them (Figure 1). The text above the cross on the left reads: 'Forma crucis Christi secundum Hebreos' ('the form of Christ's cross according to the Jews'). The text in the middle reads: 'In Ebreo, in Greco, in Latino / IHS Naçarenus rex Iudeorum / tabulam crucis Christi, ubi est ista scriptura, habet rex Cipri, quam vidit Ber(nardus), sicut michi dixit' ['in Hebrew, Greek, Latin / IHS of Nazareth king of the Jews: / the tablet of Christ's cross on which this is written belongs to the king of Cyprus, which Ber(nardus) saw, just as he told me'].⁹ Finally, the sketch on the right displays a T-shaped cross and the text above it reads: 'forma crucis latronum crucifixorum cum Christo Iesu' ('the form of the cross of the thieves who were crucified along with Jesus Christ').¹⁰

The marginalia tell us that a Franciscan friar saw the panel (*tabula*) that was placed on top of Christ's cross and exhibited the inscription 'IHS Naçarenus rex Iudeorum' in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The friar named 'B' told Francis that the relic he had encountered was in the possession of the king of Cyprus.¹¹ The name of that friar was perhaps

the saint had already been canonised – and before St Thomas Aquinas' canonisation (1323), as Thomas is only mentioned as a brother (and not as a saint) in the stories. In addition, King Robert of Naples (*regis Roberti*) appears once, thus placing the text after 1309, the date of the king's accession. Finally, other *exempla* contained in MS 442 are precisely dated to the first quarter of the fourteenth century. See Ferdinand-Marie M. Delorme, 'Un recueil de miracles ou *exempla* source de François Bartholi', *Studi Francescani* 12 (1926): 366–404 (370–1, 372, 373); Colker 'Collection of Stories', 186. The possible author of the text is revealed on f. 146v: 'Lippus dixit mihi fratri Francisco.' Cesare Cenci went a step further and suggested that the author of these excerpts was Brother Francesco Bartoli, the author of *Tractatus de indulgentia S. Mariae de Portiuncula*, who was still alive in 1343: Cesare Cenci, *Bibliotheca manuscripta ad Sacrum Conventum Assisiensem*, vol. 1 (Assisi: Casa Editrice Francescana, 1981), 227. However, Cenci's theory has not been embraced by scholars, while the name 'Francisco' cited in the text may relate only to that particular story, according to Colker, 'Collection of Stories', 184–5, 222–3, 227. Colker believes that the issue of authorship remains open but affirms that the author was Italian since there are many references to Florence and Florentines.

⁷ Delorme asserts that both the main text and the marginal gloss are written by a single, autograph hand. The marginal notes are the author's personal annotations on events that struck him as peculiar and noteworthy. See Delorme, 'Un recueil de miracles', 370. On the other hand, although he sees a single author behind the text and the notations, Colker calls into question the notion that the work is an autograph, and propounds the idea that, rather, it is the work of a 'rapid scribe': 'Collection of Stories', 187.

⁸ Most possibly, the accounts of Judaic antiquities and Christ's Passion were his own invention. Marvin L. Colker, 'A Medieval Latin Apocryphon', *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 33 (1990): 1–73 (3–4, 6–8).

⁹ The main text on f. 142v narrates irrelevant didactic stories: the first involves the opinion of the Dominican Master of Theology, Remigius dei Girolami, about usurers. The other anecdote refers to a lazy painter who was commissioned to paint a king's loggia, but he did nothing and invented a ploy to conceal his failure. Colker, 'Collection of Stories', 200–1 (nos. 55–61), 225 (note az).

¹⁰ This part of the text was not transcribed by Colker. The abbreviation 'B' is definitely for 'Ber ...' or 'Bar ...', therefore, it could be Bernard, Bertrand, Bartholomew and so forth.

¹¹ The *titulus* bearing the trilingual inscription was taken to Rome by Emperor Constantine I and his mother Helena and was kept in the monastery of Santa Croce di Gerusalemme, which was consecrated to accommodate that specific relic. It seems that the relic was forgotten by the late twelfth century and was rediscovered in 1492. Other pieces of the relic were supposedly given by Helena to Constantinople (later transported to Sainte-Chapelle in Paris). See Charles Rohault de Fleury, *Mémoire sur les instruments de la passion de N.-S. J. -C.* (Paris: L. Lesort, 1870), 183–98, especially

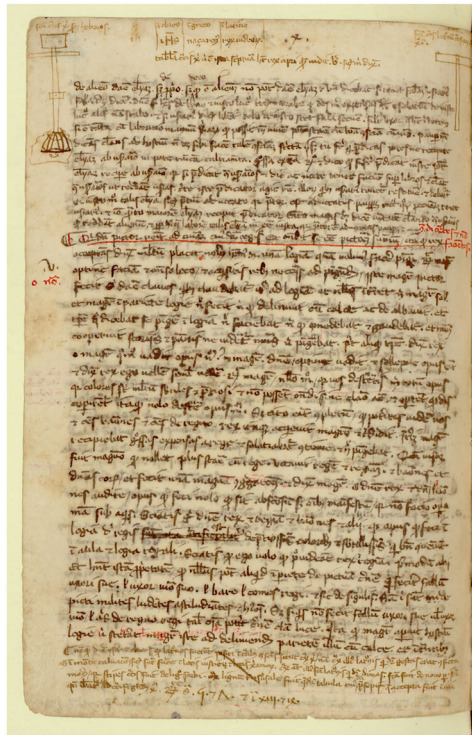


Figure 1. *Exempla aliqua notabilia*: didactic stories and marginal notes with information on Christ's Cross. Source: Archivio del Sacro Convento, Convent of San Francesco, Assisi, MS 442, f. 142v. Photo: Courtesy of the Archivio del Sacro Convento and the Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani.

Bernardo, and he has been identified as Bernardus de Quintavalle (d. 1241), the first companion of St Francis.¹² Such an assumption, however, is not valid because Francis, the author of our text, lived in the early fourteenth century, while Bernardino, who had supposedly seen the panel and made Francis aware of what he had seen (*sicut michi dixit*), was dead by 1241. Bearing in mind that the text was written between 1317 and 1323, it is reasonable to suggest that the encounter of 'B' with Christ's *titulus* occurred sometime in the late thirteenth or the first two decades of the fourteenth century in Cyprus.¹³

There is a second, comparable apocryphon entitled *Notabilia de passione Christi*, which also relied heavily on Master Isaac's accounts and was supposed to offer more

189–90; William Cowper Prime, *Holy Cross: A History of the Invention, Preservation and Disappearance of the Wood Known as the True Cross* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1877), 66–71 (the drawing of the relic features on page 70).

¹² Not unlike the author of the popular *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (c. 1300?), our authors mention how these relics were seen and venerated by other friars they knew, thus hoping that they would convince their readers of the veracity of the facts they describe. See Holly Flora, *The Devout Belief of the Imagination. The Paris Meditationes vitae Christi and Female Franciscan Spirituality in Trecento Italy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 121.

¹³ For MS 442, see Giuseppe Mazzatinti, *Inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche d'Italia*, vol. 4 (Forlì: Luigi Bordinandini, 1894), 93; Colker, 'Collection of Stories', 182, 184, 218.

details of the Passion than the Gospels.¹⁴ In this text, which was composed in a Franciscan house in L'Aquila or Padua, references to relics abound.¹⁵ In addition to Christ's *titulus* already discussed – which, according to the *Notabilia*, was made of wood from the first olive tree to bear fruit after the Flood described in Genesis and was also associated with both Noah and Solomon (Appendix: 3) – other relics held by the king of Cyprus are mentioned. One was the miraculous veil of the Virgin which was used by a man to cover Christ's loins while he was nailed on the cross (Appendix: 2). The man, if we follow the text, climbed the ladder to cover Christ's loins but fell and died, to be miraculously resuscitated on the spot.¹⁶ Moreover, the king of Cyprus is said to have had a white, bell-shaped rock that had seven angles on its surface and was perforated in the middle (from top to bottom), which had the cross of Christ fixed in it;¹⁷ and finally, the same king kept one of the whips with which Christ was scourged.¹⁸ A priest recounted to the author of the *Notabilia* that he observed and kissed the relic of the whip that was in the custody of the king of Cyprus, but he could not remember the king's name (Appendix: 4).¹⁹ These relics, then, all belonged to a king of Cyprus, whose name is not revealed in the apocryphal stories.²⁰ Interestingly, in addition to these relics in royal possession, the *Notabilia de passione* claims a certain *comes Arabs* (perhaps an Arab Christian count?), who lived on the island of Cyprus, retained the seat or chair on which Jesus Christ was sat and mocked (Appendix: 6).²¹

¹⁴ As in the *exempla* contained in MS 442, Isaac and Nudus appear frequently in this work too: Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 4. Colker suggests that it was the disciple of Master Isaac who produced the *Notabilia de passione Christi*, 'most likely a Franciscan brother', 9–10, 12.

¹⁵ The *Notabilia de passione* survives in nine manuscripts that were written in Italy and date to around the mid/late fifteenth century, except for one codex that belongs to the sixteenth century: Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 10–11, 12–13. Since the author of the *Notabilia* was 'the disciple' of Master Isaac, Colker places the authorship of the work between the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century: 10.

¹⁶ Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 46 (no. 41). Other Franciscan accounts of the Passion relay that Christ's loincloth was cut from the Virgin's head covering, among them the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, and an early thirteenth-century apocryphal work, the *Vita beate Virginis Marie et Salvatoris rhythmica*. For the exegesis, symbolism and depictions of the Virgin's head covering or veil in Franciscan visual arts, see Holly Flora, *Cimabue and the Franciscans* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 189–99.

¹⁷ In another section of the *Notabilia* the relic of the white rock is described in more detail: 'Et lapis iste est albus et habet septem angulos circumcirca et est longitudinis quinque brachiorum. Et erat ad formam unius magne campane et erat perforatus in medio a sumo usque deorsum.' Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 21 (no. 2). The author even gives the length of the rock, that is five 'arms' (about 3.5 metres).

¹⁸ One remaining flagellation chord is kept in the abbey of St Benedict in Subiaco: Fleury, *Mémoire sur les instruments*, 267. This relic was brought from Constantinople to the abbey of Corbie in north-eastern France and also to Aachen: Paul Edouard Didier Riant, *Exuviae Sacrae Constantinopolitanae*, vol. 2 (Geneva: J.G. Fick, 1878), 175–6, 198; Wilfrid Bonser, 'The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages', *Folklore* 73, no. 4 (1962): 234–56 (242).

¹⁹ 'Tenet quidam rex, cuius nomen non recordatur sacerdos qui hoc retulit. Et ipsum fuit osculatus': Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 54. Worth noting is a case of 'holy theft' of a piece from the cloak of the Virgin Mary ('partem aliquam panni sive tunice manibus'), that happened in the Church of St Mary of Bethlehem in Acre on Good Friday of 1273, by a certain Arnaldo, who carried the relic to his native town, Volterra. The veracity of Arnaldo's story was confirmed by two Franciscan friars who also resided in Acre when the theft took place. See Jacopo Paganelli, 'Pretiosum pannum cum Dei et beate Marie Virginis adiutorio Vulterras deferret.' Un furto sacro nella Volterra dei guelfi e dei ghibellini', *Archivio Storico Italiano* 177, no. 2 (2019): 353–67 (356, 366–7).

²⁰ Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 2, 10, 45 (no. 41), 49 (no. 46), 53–4 (no. 53).

²¹ Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 56 (no. 55). The chair on which Jesus sat when he received the Crown of Thorns was attested to in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in the crusader-built Choir of the Canons, behind the high altar, by an unidentified Icelandic pilgrim (perhaps Abbot Nikulás of Munkaþverá) in the mid twelfth century. See Benjamin Z. Kedar and Christian Westergård-Nielsen, 'Icelanders in the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Twelfth-Century Account', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978–9): 193–211 (208, and Figure 1); John Wilkinson, Joyce Hill and W.F. Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099–1185* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1988), 221; Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, vol. 3: *The City of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

Both the *Exempla* and the *Notabilia* are aligned with Franciscan devotion to the Passion of Christ and with fourteenth-century developments in the Legend of the Cross, which became immensely popular at that time.²² There is little need to overstate the relationship the Franciscans had with Christ's Passion, since Francis immersed himself in the suffering of the Lord, to such an extent that he was considered an *alter Christus*, or second Christ, from the very moment he was marked by the Christ-like stigmata while meditating on Mount La Verna.²³ Francis' dedication to the Passion was bequeathed to his devotees, who were equally enthusiastic for the reverence of the Passion of the Lord and expressed this in textual sources, most prominently in works such as the *Officium de passione Domini*, the *Lignum vitae*, the *Vita mystica sive Tractatus de passione Domini*, or the *Legenda maior* by St Bonaventura di Bagnoregio, minister of the Order from 1257 to 1274; and, of course, the famous early fourteenth-century *Meditationes vitae Christi*.²⁴ This last work, in particular, just as the works under discussion, was compiled by a Franciscan friar residing in San Gimignano, and, like our author, he also references relics of Christ and the Virgin Mary, but his allusion to relics is not as extensive as in our texts.²⁵ What is more, the unique privilege the Franciscans enjoyed among the Latin Orders, namely, of residing at the Holy Sepulchre, Mount Sion and Bethlehem – and, in effect, becoming custodians of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during the first half of the fourteenth century – must have certainly played its role in the dissemination and popularity of such apocryphal stories of the Life and Passion of Christ and the Legend of the Cross.²⁶

In addition to textual sources, the Passion of Christ was pivotal in the art of the Franciscan Order, and, as Anne Derbes compellingly puts it, 'Franciscan spirituality' became

²² For this topic, see Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood. The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 194–349. In particular, the 'Legend of the Wood of the Cross', a collation of stories about Christ's cross in the Old Testament and how it came to be used in the Passion, was extremely popular and was based on the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine's (d. 1298) *Legenda aurea*, which, in turn, seems to have echoed Greek sources. In the narration of 'The Passion of the Lord', or 'The Finding of the Holy Cross', for instance, Jacobus is acquainted with apocryphal stories of the Greeks: 'A Greek history says ...', 'In a certain admittedly apocryphal history of the Greeks we read that ...': Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans William Granger Ryan, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 209, 277.

²³ H.W. Os, 'St Francis of Assisi as a Second Christ in Early Italian Painting', *Simiolus* 7, no. 3 (1974): 115–32; Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy. Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19–24.

²⁴ For these works by Bonaventura, see Doctoris seraphici S. Bonaventurae, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 8, ed. Aloysii Lauer (Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898), 68–87, 152–8, 159–229, 504–64; J.A. Wayne Hellmann, Regis J. Armstrong and William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2: *The Founder* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 495–758. For the *Meditationes*, see Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds. and trans., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale Ms. Ital. 115* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. and ed. F.X. Taney, A. Miller and C.M. Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2000).

²⁵ The author of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* does not indicate the exact guardian of each relic as our author does. Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 22. For the relics in the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, see Ragusa and Green, eds. and trans., *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, 43–4, 311, 326, 329, 332; John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, 24, 229, 244. The author reports that he saw and measured the square boards comprising the table of the Last Supper in the Lateran; he also relates that the column of the Flagellation is extant today, as a fellow brother had told him so. See also Flora, *Devout Belief*, 110, 120, 121.

²⁶ First, through a firman issued by Sultan al-Nāsir Muhammad on 11 July 1309, and then, in 1332–3, with the assistance of King Robert of Anjou and Queen Sancia, the Franciscans prevailed over the other orders in the Holy Sepulchre. See Girolamo Golubovich, *Serie cronologica dei reverendissimi superiori di Terra Santa* (Jerusalem: Convento di S. Salvatore, 1898), XX–XXI, 128–30, 197; Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 12; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 3: 33.

‘virtually synonymous with the veneration of Christ’s suffering on the cross’.²⁷ In artistic commissions of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the emphasis on the Passion and the drawing of parallels between Francis and Christ are evident. They can be found from as early as the 1260s in the work of the ‘Maestro di San Francesco’ in the nave of the Lower Church at Assisi, and also, three decades later in that of Giotto or artists close to him, in the nave of the Upper Church.²⁸ In a kindred Franciscan spirit, in the early 1320s, the Franciscans of Santa Croce in Florence commissioned a polyptych for the high altar in the recently constructed transept, which bore seven Passion scenes on its predella, and also stained-glass windows with themes that emphasised the central role occupied by the Cross and Christ’s Passion in Franciscan worship. More importantly, the extensive narrative cycle of the Discovery of the True Cross, frescoes painted by Agnolo Gaddi and his workshop between 1388 and 1393 in the Cappella Maggiore, in the same institution, is the first of its kind and celebrates the power of an actual relic that the friars had treasured in the church since 1258.²⁹ In fact, the programmes of the altarpiece, frescoes and stained-glass windows were made to exalt the relic of the True Cross and a piece from the Crown of Thorns given to the friars by Louis IX of France, who had brought these hallowed treasures from the Holy Land.³⁰ It is within this context that the apocryphal texts discussed in this study should be read.

Cyprus: a land of wondrous Passion relics

Relics related to the Passion of Christ are generally known to have been preserved in Cyprus, but those cited in these Franciscan sources, to my knowledge, have received almost no scholarly attention. Moreover, most Passion relics mentioned in textual evidence, in pilgrimage or miraculous accounts, were said to have been in the guardianship of churches and monasteries, not of the Lusignan kings.³¹ The most famous relic in Cyprus was the cross of the penitent thief, which was kept in the Benedictine Monastery of the Cross in Stavrovouni and has been documented by numerous pilgrims across the centuries.³² In addition to the relic of Stavrovouni, other relics associated with the Passion are recorded by travellers to the island. In 1395, the Italian notary, Nicola de Martoni, went to the convent of St Mary of Carmel in Famagusta, and, among other sacred objects, he viewed ‘a piece of the wood of the Holy Cross of our Lord’. Martoni also visited the abbey in Stavrovouni and, apart from the cross of the penitent thief, he

²⁷ Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*, 17.

²⁸ Cooper and Robson, *Making of Assisi*, 127–52.

²⁹ Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 350–73; Nancy M. Thompson, ‘The Franciscans and the True Cross: The Decoration of the Cappella Maggiore of Santa Croce in Florence’, *Gesta* 43, no. 1 (2004): 61–79.

³⁰ Baert, *Heritage of Holy Wood*, 351; Thompson, ‘Franciscans and the True Cross’, 61, 65, note 5.

³¹ In 1336, the pilgrim, Wilhelm von Boldensele, reported that the skull of a local saint, Sozomenus, was in the custody of the king of Cyprus (in that instance Hugh IV) in the royal chapel (*capella regia*). The same pilgrim also notes that the sacred cadaver of St Hilarion was also under the supervision of the king (*custodia regia*) in the castle *Dieu d’amour* (i.e. St Hilarion Castle). It is reported that King Hugh IV Lusignan dispatched two Franciscan missionaries to offer as a gift to King Peter IV of Aragon the head of the apostle Barnabas, which the king made sure was contained in a precious silver and golden reliquary, studded with precious stones. For more on these topics, with further bibliography, see the recent and rich article by Michele Bacci, ‘Reliquiensammlungen in Jerusalem und Zypern (12.–14. Jahrhundert)’, in *Palatium Sacrum: Sakralität am Hof des Mittelalters. Orte, Dinge, Rituale*, eds. Manfred Luchterhandt and Hedwig Röckelein (Regensburg: Schnell and Steiner GmbH, 2021), 279–300 (285, 288, 291–2).

³² The testimonies of the Stavrovouni cross are copious, so I will limit myself to just one comprehensive citation: Fleury, *Mémoire sur les instruments*, 324–5.

was shown one of the nails that fixed the hands of Christ to the cross, and a piece of the wood from Christ's cross, enshrined in silver and embedded into the cross of the penitent thief.³³ In 1483, the Swiss Dominican friar, Felix Faber, recounted that in a village near Stavrovouni, named Holy Cross, there was a Latin church that held the arm of St Anne and a nail used in Christ's crucifixion, now covered in silver.³⁴ A few years later, in 1518, the French merchant, Jacques le Saige, noted that in the cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in Nicosia he was presented with a double cross inside which was laid a piece of the cross of Christ, some four inches long, and various relics.³⁵ In his *Chorograffia* (1573), the Dominican friar, Steffano Lusignano, affirmed that the city of Nicosia tended many holy relics. One such was a fragment of the Holy Cross and another a coin from the 30 with which Judas was paid for betraying Christ.³⁶ A splinter of Christ's cross was (and still is) held in the church of the Holy Cross in Lefkara, where, in 1321, the Greek bishop Olvianos commissioned a silver-gilt case to hold the relic.³⁷ The Cypriot chronicler, Leontios Makhairas (c.1380–after 1432), describes the trials and tribulations of another relic of the True Cross that was conserved in the vicinity of Lefkara, in the village of Tochni, and was stolen by a Latin priest in 1318, to be recovered only in 1340 by a young shepherd. The relic of Tochni, which in fact comprised part of the footrest from Christ's cross, was subjected to trial by fire, at the request of Mark, the Latin bishop of Famagusta, and miraculously came through uninjured. Upon witnessing the miracle, the Lusignano royal family founded a Greek-rite monastery of the Cross near Nicosia to house the relic.³⁸ This liminal moment of the miraculous enactment of the relic prompted King Hugh IV to initiate an open confrontation between the Greek and Latin Churches, which tested their respective merits and credibility; thereafter, Hugh IV became more tolerant of and favourable towards the Greek Church.³⁹ Finally, sixteenth-century pilgrims report that in the cemetery of the Dominican convent in Nicosia stood a pillar, said to comprise part of the column of the Flagellation at which Christ was scourged.⁴⁰

³³ Nicolas De Marotni, 'Relation du pèlerinage à Jérusalem de Nicolas de Martoni, notaire Italien (1394–1395)', ed. Léon Legrand, *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895): 566–669 (630, 635–7). For an English translation, see Claude D. Cobham, trans., *Excerpta Cypria. Materials for a History of Cyprus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 23, 27.

³⁴ Cunradus D. Hassler, ed., *Fratris Felicis Fabri Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti peregrinationem*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Sumtibus Societatis Litterariae Stuttgardiensis, 1843), 177. Also see Cobham, ed., *Excerpta Cypria*, 40. A few decades before Faber, in 1450, the abbot of Stavrovouni presented the travellers Steffan Von Gumpenberg and his companions with a host of relics that were held in a store, including the arm of St Anne and one of the sacred nails. Were these the same relics that Faber would see 33 years later? See Gilles Grivaud, ed., *Excerpta Cypria nova. Voyageurs occidentaux à Chypre au XVème siècle* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1990), 65–6.

³⁵ Cobham, ed., *Excerpta Cypria*, 59.

³⁶ Steffano Lusignano, *Chorograffia et brevis historia universale dell'isola de Cipro principiando al tempo di Noè per il sino al 1572* (Bologna: Alessandro Benaccio, 1573), f. 16r.

³⁷ Athanasios Papageorgiou, 'Ο Σταυρός των Λευκάρων', in *Θυμίαμα στη μνήμη της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα*, vol. 1: *Κείμενα*, ed. Lucy Bratzioti (Athens: Benaki Museum, 1994), 245–50.

³⁸ Leontios Makhairas, *Recital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus entitled 'Chronicle'*, ed. R.M. Dawkins, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), §§ 7–8, 63–73; Michalis Pieris and Angel Nicolaou-Konnari, eds., *Λεοντίου Μαχαίρα, Χρονικό της Κύπρου: Παράλληλη διπλωματική έκδοση των χειρογράφων* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2003), 101–8; Nicholas Coureas, *The Latin Church in Cyprus, 1313–78* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2010), 438–9; Chrysovalantis Kyriacou, *Orthodox Cyprus under the Latins, 1191–1571. Society, Spirituality, and Identities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 83.

³⁹ Christopher D. Schabel, 'Archbishop Elias and the Synodicum Nicosiense', in idem, *Greeks, Latins, and the Church in Early Frankish Cyprus*. Variorum Collected Studies Series (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), article IX, 61–81 (69–71).

⁴⁰ Joseph R. Jones, ed., *Viageros españoles a Tierra Santa (siglos XVI y XVII)* (Madrid: Miraguano Ediciones, 1998), 141; Michele Bacci, 'Spazi sacri e rappresentazione del potere nella Cipro dei Lusignano', in *Medioevo: la chiesa e il palazzo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Parma, 20–24 settembre 2005*, ed. Arturo C. Quintavalle (Milan:

Of all these examples, only the cross from Tochni is plainly linked to Cypriot royalty, though the relic was not in their possession; instead, Queen Alice d'Belin (1304/6–after 1386), her spouse Hugh IV Lusignan (r. 1324–59), and the queen's aunt, Mary d'Belin, built a Greek-rite monastery for the safekeeping of the relic.⁴¹ In May 1363, King Hugh IV's physician, Petro de Pestagali, hastened to Constantinople to buy holy relics, including several Passion relics – among them a fragment from the stone of the sepulchre, the sponge from the crucifixion, part of the Flagellation column, a splinter of the Holy Cross, soil from Golgotha, holy bread and many others.⁴² The text does not tell us where the relics were eventually deposited, but Michele Bacci suggests that Pestagali might have functioned as intermediary for the Cypriot royal court.⁴³ Later in the fourteenth century, we know that on his long voyages to Western Europe, King Peter I Lusignan (r. 1359–69) carried relics of the cross, which he offered as gifts.⁴⁴ Another relic of the Cross was linked to two of King Peter I's close companions, the Grand Chancellor of Cyprus, Philippe de Mézières, and the papal legate in the East and Latin patriarch of Constantinople, the Carmelite Peter Thomas. That fragment of the cross was probably procured by Peter Thomas in the Holy Land in 1360, and so cherished was it that he carried it with him during the attack on Alexandria in 1365 and on his deathbed the following year. The relic was bequeathed to Philippe de Mézières, who, on 23 December 1369, donated it to the Confraternity of San Giovanni Evangelista in Venice. The fragment was revered by the Venetians for centuries and was held to work miracles.⁴⁵ About a century later, Queen Carlotta Lusignan (r. 1458–64) seems to have carried to Rome a part of the True Cross, which, after her death in 1487, was found for sale in Venice.⁴⁶

It is reasonable, therefore, to wonder whether the relics cited by the *Notabilia de passione* and the *Exempla aliqua* were objects actually in the custody of the kings of Cyprus. If that were the case, the early fourteenth-century Franciscan testimonies are among the earliest surviving that allude to Passion relics in Cyprus; they must have been destined for

Electa, 2007), 183–92 (184). However, the pilgrim, Ulrich Leman (1472–3), speaks of the marble column at St Dominic's, and specifies that this was not the Flagellation pillar, but a marble column to which Christ was tied, in Pilate's court, whilst awaiting condemnation. See Grivaud, ed., *Excerpta Cyprica nova*, 86; Bacci, 'Reliquiensammlungen in Jerusalem und Zypern', 296.

⁴¹ Makhairas, *Recital concerning the Sweet Land*, vol. 1, §§ 75–6. Although the cross of Tochni did not actually belong to the king, Hugh IV's name was closely bound to it. It should also be noted that in Gilles Grivaud's powerful reading, Hugh IV used the tale of the Tochni cross as token of his role as ruler and protector of the whole population of his domain, both Greek Orthodox and Latin. See Gilles Grivaud, 'Grecs et francs dans le royaume de Chypre (1191–1474): les voies de acculturation' (Doctoral diss., Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2001), 288–98.

⁴² The number of relics Petro acquired from the city is impressive. In addition to around 20 Passion relics, he also bought some 37 skulls of saints along with other kinds of holy objects. See Franz Miklosich and Joseph Müller, eds., *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, vol. 5 (Vienna: Carolus Gerold, 1887), 273–5 (XI, 6871).

⁴³ Bacci, 'Reliquiensammlungen in Jerusalem und Zypern', 295. In 1363, the king of Cyprus was Peter I Lusignan, whose devotion to the Passion and the Cross was legendary: Anthi Andronikou, *Italy, Cyprus, and Artistic Exchange in the Medieval Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 224–42, with further bibliography.

⁴⁴ In 1364, for example, Peter visited Boulogne-sur-Mer and gave the town a relic of the True Cross: Daniel Haigueré, *Histoire de Notre-Dame de Boulogne* (Boulogne-sur-Mer: Rousseau-Leroy, 1864), 104; Philippe Trélat, 'Le goût pour Chypre. Objets d'art et tissus précieux importés de Chypre en Occident (XIIIe–XVe siècles)', *Cahiers du Centre d'Études Chypriotes* 43 (2013): 455–72 (467).

⁴⁵ For an insightful discussion of the relic, its fate and its reliquary, see Holger A. Klein, 'Cardinal Bessarion, Philippe de Mézières and the Rhetoric of Relics in Late Medieval Venice', in *La stauroteca di Bessarione fra Costantinopoli e Venezia*, eds. Holger A. Klein, Valeria Poletto and Peter Schreiner (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2017), 3–39 (7, 14–20).

⁴⁶ 'Questo [Francescheto Cibo, an illegal son of Pope Innocent VIII] vene assa' ferialmente, et portoe una croce la qual era quasi tuta dil legno di la croce verissima, che era in Cypro, che ha tanta fama. Et dice che da la raina Carlota dita croce di Cypro fo portata a Roma, et a lui poi capitò ne le mano'. Marino Sanuto, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto*, vol. 1, ed. Federico Stefani (Venice: Marco Visentini, 1879), col. 751.

private use only, or destroyed at an early date, as they are not commemorated in later centuries by pilgrims. The question remains of which king might have collected them. Marvin Colker, the first scholar to transcribe and publish the apocrypha, argues that, in its greatest part, referring to Judaic antiquities and the narratives of the Passion, the content of the *Notabilia* is a fabrication – although it is based on earlier works, such as Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica* (c.1178), the legend of Seth and the oil of the Tree of Mercy and Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*. However, Isaac, his teacher Nudus, a hermit who lived in the wilderness of Toulouse, and a third person, a disciple of Isaac (the probable author of the *Notabilia*), were real people.⁴⁷ Colker also suggests that the allusion to numerous relics was possibly based on a catalogue the author had at his disposal.⁴⁸ The composer of the *Notabilia* reports that the Crown of Thorns, the Lance and other relics of Christ's Passion were the property of the king of France, and this is, in fact, the case, since such *reliquiae* were deposited in Sainte-Chapelle (Appendix: 4). The building of the palace chapel was begun by Louis IX in 1238 to house his precious relic collection, the most prestigious pieces of which were the Crown of Thorns and the Lance; all the relics were housed in the spectacular *Grande châsse* that was placed at the east end of the chapel, and was destroyed, along with all the relics it contained, during the French Revolution.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Franciscan composer of the *Notabilia* rightly enumerates other relics that were amassed at Saint-Denis and Aachen.⁵⁰ For example, he correctly states that in the abbey of Saint-Denis was kept the nail that pierced one of the hands of Christ (Appendix: 6). During the twelfth century, under Abbot Suger (c.1081–1151), several new relics arrived at Saint-Denis, among them the 'Nail and Crown of our Lord'.⁵¹ The sacred objects retained at Aachen included the linen apron with which Christ washed his disciples' feet and *domine nostre camisia* (Appendix: 6).⁵² Our Franciscan author was well informed about the relics there: the apron was part of the relic collection held by Charlemagne (747–814) in his palace chapel at Aachen and was given to the monks of the Benedictine monastery there (which is today Kornelimünster Abbey) by Louis the Pious (778–840), Charlemagne's son, in 814.⁵³ Also, a *camisia* of Christ is

⁴⁷ Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 3–10.

⁴⁸ Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 8, 10.

⁴⁹ Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust. How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 135–6; Holger A. Klein, 'Sacred Things and Holy Bodies. Collecting Relics from Late Antiquity to the Early Renaissance', in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, eds. Martina Bagnoli and others (London: The British Museum Press, 2010), 55–67 (59); Cynthia Hahn, *Passion Relics and the Medieval Imagination. Art, Architecture, and Society* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 82–90; for the treasure of the Sainte-Chapelle: Jannic Durand and Marie-Pierre Lafitte, eds., *Le trésor de la Sainte-Chapelle* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, 2001).

⁵⁰ For the relics belonging to the king of France and the abbey of Saint-Denis as mentioned in the text, Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 53–4 (no. 53) and 55 (no. 55). For the relics of Christ in Paris and in general, see Riant, *Exuviae Sacrae*, 217; Fleury, *Mémoire sur les instruments*, 110–16, 165–81; Bonser, 'Cult of Relics', 242, 243.

⁵¹ Freeman, *Holy Bones*, 111.

⁵² Charlemagne had an extensive collection of relics which he purportedly brought back from his visit to Constantinople: Freeman, *Holy Bones*, 121; Anne Latowsky, 'Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon, and Louis IX of France', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 200–14 (205–8).

⁵³ Heinrich Schiffers, *Der Reliquienschatz Karls des Großen und die Anfänge der Aachenfahrt* (Aachen: Johannes Volk, 1951), 29, 81. The apron relic is indeed linen and is still kept in the abbey of Kornelimünster. Our author seemed to know that the Washing of the Feet relic was preserved in the palace chapel in Aachen, the place where the emperors were crowned ('Item in Aquisgrani, ubi coronatur imperatores in Alemania'), while for the 'camisia', he specified that it was in the place where Charlemagne was buried (that is, in the cathedral): 'in ecclesia maiori ubi iacet sanctus Charolus magnus'.

recorded as belonging to the cathedral of Aachen in an inventory of 1238/9.⁵⁴ Taking his accuracy into account, we should, therefore, not immediately dismiss as fictitious the references made by the *Notabilia* and the *Exempla* to sacred relics. Likewise, the possibility that the Lusignan kings of Cyprus might have had a repository of relics related to the Passion of Christ, which perhaps had been lost or was inaccessible to most pilgrims, should also be entertained. It is remarkable that, in two cases, the author of the *Notabilia* states that the ‘rex Cipri’ ‘tenet et habet cum suis reliquis’ and ‘conservat et tenet cum suis reliquis’,⁵⁵ phrases implying that the king had a collection of relics.⁵⁶

Textual sources relate that the Lusignan kings had their own private oratory in the palace in Nicosia, which was most probably furnished with relics.⁵⁷ Peter I Lusignan was planning to build a chapel to preserve the column of the Flagellation, which he venerated deeply, and which he had taken from the Mamluk sultan of Egypt. However, we do not know if that chapel was ever built, and it is certain that the column noted by pilgrims in the Dominican convent of Nicosia was not the one coveted by Peter.⁵⁸ The fact that historical evidence about the presence of such relics in Cyprus did not withstand the test of time does not mean that these relics did not exist. Relics associated with Christ’s Passion were among the most sacred in Christendom, and they would have conferred on the Lusignans a high status – and divine approval. In a similar way, before the conquest of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204, the Byzantine emperors boasted a collection of sacred relics that were hoarded in the Chapel of the Virgin of the Pharos (Lighthouse) inside the imperial palace, which was erected in the eighth century. Viewing these relics was a privilege only the most illustrious foreign visitors could enjoy, while the gift of relics to some was a sign of the emperor’s superiority over his

⁵⁴ Schiffers, *Der Reliquienschatz Karls des Großen*, 47. The phrase *domine nostre* appears to be associated with the Virgin Mary, whose *camisia* (smock) worn during her time nursing the Christ child, is currently preserved at the cathedral of Aachen. The earliest recorded mention of its presence there dates back to 1238/9: Monica Paredis-Vroon, Chris Verheken-Lammens and Daniël de Jonghe, ‘The Major Relics of Aachen Cathedral’, *Bulletin du CIETA* 73 (1995–6): 15–26 (15–16, 21–3); Lisa Victoria Ciresi, ‘The Aachen Marienschrein as an Alternate Body for the Virgin’, in *Binding the Absent Body in Medieval and Modern Art: Abject, Virtual, and Alternate bodies*, eds. Emily Kelley and Elizabeth Richards Rivenbark (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 51–73 (53–5). However, given that this relic is mentioned in a text that lists relics related to Christ’s Passion, it is possible that a transcription error has occurred. Might this have been in intention *domini nostri* rather than *domine nostre*? Despite this, our Franciscan source is accurate, as both relics are confirmed to be from Aachen Cathedral.

⁵⁵ Colker, ‘Medieval Latin Apocryphon’, 46, 49.

⁵⁶ It is highly probable that this was the case because relics were held to be more powerful when they were kept in groups. They had a ‘collective potency’ as Cynthia Hahn aptly remarks: Hahn, *Passion Relics*, 55, 79.

⁵⁷ The pilgrim Jacopo da Verona, in 1335, explicitly avers that Hugh IV had his own palace chapel, one that might have been different from the church of the Dominican convent that was annexed to the royal palace: Cobham, ed., *Excerpta Cypria*, 16–17; Bacci, ‘Reliquiensammlungen in Jerusalem und Zypern’, 285. In the same vein, in 1237, King Henry I was granted the right by Pope Gregory IX to receive the sacrament in his private chapel, along with his family: Nicholas Coureas and Christopher Schabel, eds., *The Cartulary of the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom of Nicosia* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1997), 173 (no. 67). Another reference to a royal chapel under Henry I is given by Pope Innocent IV in 1252: Christopher Schabel and Jean Richard, eds., *Bullarium Cyprium: Papal Letters Concerning Cyprus 1196–1261*, vol. 1 (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2010), 410, e–67. In March 1295, Pope Boniface VIII wrote to King Henry II and mentioned the private chapel of Henry, his mother and his brothers, in which they were allowed to attend divine office: Christopher Schabel, ed., *Bullarium Cyprium: Papal Letters Concerning Cyprus 1261–1314*, vol. 2 (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2010), 188, o–3.

⁵⁸ Guillaume de Machaut, *La prise d’Alexandrie (The Taking of Alexandria)*, ed. and trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Routledge, 2002), 280–2; Michalis Olympios, *Building the Sacred in a Crusader Kingdom. Gothic Church Architecture in Lusignan Cyprus, c.1209–c.1373* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 16. A fragment of the Flagellation column was also included in Charlemagne’s collection of Passion relics in Aachen and is attested to in the inventory of 1238/9: Schiffers, *Der Reliquienschatz Karls des Großen*, 47.

Western guests.⁵⁹ Much like the Byzantine emperors, the Cypriot Lusignan acted as proprietors and distributors of relics of the Holy Cross: an assurance of their legitimate status as the prestigious inheritors of the kingdom of Jerusalem after the final expulsion of the crusaders from the Holy Land in 1291.⁶⁰

That these Franciscan apocryphal stories were compiled in the early fourteenth century make it possible that the king of Cyprus who collected the relics of the Passion was Henry II (r. 1285–1324), a fervent supporter of the Franciscan Order.⁶¹ Henry II was commemorated by the Franciscans on many occasions as a pious man and an adherent of their order.⁶² In the early years of his reign, Henry II erected an altar dedicated to St Francis of Assisi in the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in Nicosia (1285/6).⁶³ The king also had a Franciscan friar as his confessor, while another Franciscan, Matthew, the second Franciscan bishop of Famagusta, was the king's personal physician.⁶⁴ One of Henry's advisers and companions was the Franciscan bishop Aimery of Paphos, while the Franciscans Peter of Vienna and John of Paris acted as nuncios of the king to the papal curia in Avignon and to the king of France in 1323.⁶⁵ In Famagusta, Henry II built a secret passage that connected the royal palace to the Franciscan convent and through it he frequently visited the friars.⁶⁶ When Henry II died, he was buried in the church of the Franciscans in Nicosia, near the high altar and, according to some sources, was clad in the Franciscan habit.⁶⁷ Bearing all this in mind, it is likely that the Franciscan friars were aware of any holy treasures

⁵⁹ For the circulation of relics once owned by the Byzantine emperors and their transfer to the West, see Holger A. Klein, 'Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West', *Dumbar-ton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004): 283–314, especially 283–92. Among other relics, the emperors had the Holy Lance, a piece of the True Cross, the Holy Mandylion of Edessa, the reed and the sponge that were used to give Christ vinegar and gall while on the Cross. See also Derek Krueger, 'The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium', in *Treasures of Heaven*, eds. Bagnoli and others, 5–17 (13).

⁶⁰ For analogous appropriations of relics by high-ranking clerics in the Holy Land, see Alan V. Murray, "'Mighty Against the Enemies of Christ": The Relic of the True Cross in the Armies of the Kingdom of Jerusalem', in *The Crusades and Their Sources. Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton*, eds. John France and William G. Zajac (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 217–38 (220–1); Bacci, 'Reliquiensammlungen in Jerusalem und Zypern', 282, 293, 295.

⁶¹ Christopher Schabel, 'A Neglected Quarrel over a House in Cyprus in 1299: The Nicosia Franciscans vs. the Chapter of Nicosia Cathedral', *Crusades* 8 (2009): 173–90 (175). In stark contrast to Henry II, his successor, Hugh IV, was an avid champion of the Dominicans.

⁶² For instance, in the *Chronica* (1365–9) by Fra Bernardo da Bessa: 'Regnabat circa illa tempora in regno Cypri recollendae memoriae dominus Henricus, virgo purissimus usque ad mortem, quamvis uxorem haberet, et cum virtute perfectus, qui fratres intime diligebat et in fine fuit cum habitum in conventu Nicosiae cum fratribus tumultatus, Cuius sepulcrum est variis miraculis gloriosum.' Fr. Bernardus a Bessa, 'Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum cum pluribus appendicibus inter quas excellit hucusque ineditus liber de laudibus S. Francisci', *Analecta Franciscana* 3 (1897): 1–692 (484).

⁶³ Coureas and Schabel, eds., *Cartulary of the Cathedral*, 160–2 (no. 57).

⁶⁴ George Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. 2: *The Frankish Period, 1192–1432* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 284; Nicholas Coureas, *The Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195–1312* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 235, 237.

⁶⁵ Hill, *History of Cyprus*, 2: 282, note 1; 283; Peter W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191–1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 139; Coureas, *Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195–1312*, 209; Coureas, *Latin Church in Cyprus, 1313–1378*, 24, 330.

⁶⁶ Coureas, *Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195–1312*, 237–8.

⁶⁷ René De Mas Latrie, ed., *Chronique de l'île de Chypre par Florio Bustron* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1886), 252. Florio Bustron mentions that the king was buried in his regal robes. On the other hand, according to Fra Bartolomeo de Pisa, the king was buried in a Franciscan habit: Fra Bartholomaeo de Pisa, 'De conformitate vitae beati Francisci ad vitam domini Iesu, Liber I. Fructus I–XII', *Analecta Franciscana* 4 (1906): 533. The Dominican friar, Steffano Lusignan, reports that in the last year of his reign Henry II assumed the Franciscan habit. However, Lusignan seems not ready to accept this information as objective and underlines that this view has been broadcast by the historians of the Order. Estienne de Lusignan, *Basilicon Philactirion* (Paris: Marc Orry, 1585), f. 123r. For a more recent and nuanced approach, see Olympios, *Building the Sacred*, 14–15, 162–3.

Henry II might have had in his collection.⁶⁸ The significance of the *Exempla* and the *Notabilia* becomes apparent at this point: the accounts of other visitors could only note relics that were not in royal possession, as these visitors had no access to the kings' relics. Conversely, the fact that these two Franciscan documents are so specific in describing the ensemble of relics in Lusignan hands is evidence of the privileged access granted to certain Franciscans during the reign of Henry II, a pro-Franciscan king. One could even reflect that Henry himself might be the explanation for this burgeoning of detailed references in the Franciscan documentary evidence to the relics collected and held in royal hands.

It is not by accident, in my view, that the Franciscan narratives also refer to relics that the king of Armenia had in his care, such as the halter that was placed around Christ's neck, the cloth with which his eyes were covered, the document that contained Pilate's judgement, and the reed to which the sponge was attached (Appendix: 5).⁶⁹ Nor does the text record the name of that Armenian king either: I would identify him as King Het'um II of Armenia (1266–1307), a king who converted to the Latin rite and who was a passionate follower of the Franciscan Order. Het'um had joined the Order from time to time, adopting the name John, on his first abdication of the throne in 1293.⁷⁰ During his rule, beginning in 1289, the kingdom of Cilician Armenia had followed pro-Latin policies and it is at that point that the Franciscans became interested in it, founding three Franciscan monasteries, in Cilicia, Sis and Tarsus. When Pope Nicholas IV (r. 1288–92) came to the papal throne, Het'um asked him to dispatch Franciscan missionaries to his kingdom.⁷¹ In the summer of 1300, after the battle of Homs, the Armenian king is recorded visiting the Holy Land for two weeks, where, in Jerusalem, he constructed an altar in the Church of St Mary of Jehoshaphat.⁷² Yet, before his journey to Jerusalem, in 1296, Het'um, along with his brother T'oros, travelled to Constantinople to visit their sister Maria, who was married to Michael Palaiologos (later Emperor Michael IX) in that same year, and they possibly remained there for some six months.⁷³ It is possible that the Armenian king acquired (or was given) some of these relics from the Holy Land or Constantinople during his stays in those places. Het'um's recovery of the relic of the right hand of St Gregory the Illuminator and of several other relics from the castle of Hromgla in around 1293 demonstrates the king's piety and devotion to relics.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ The Franciscan author of the stories implies that Henry was devout, since he most reverently ('reverentissime') preserved those relics, an opinion that runs counter to that of other Italians, such as Boccaccio, who calls him 'rex inutilis' and considers him a bad and inept ruler. Edward Peters, 'Henry II of Cyprus, Rex inutilis: A Footnote to Decameron 1.9', *Speculum* 72, no. 3 (1997): 763–75.

⁶⁹ Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 2. The kings of Cyprus had dynastic connections with the kings of Lesser Armenia, with several intermarriages in the thirteenth century: Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 115, with further bibliography.

⁷⁰ Angus Stewart, 'The Assassination of King Het'um II: The Conversion of the Ilkhans and the Armenians', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, no. 1 (2005): 45–61 (49).

⁷¹ Claude Mutafian, *Le royaume arménien de Cilicie XIIIe–XIVe siècle* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1993), 70–3. For Het'um's reign and his relations with the Mongols and Mamluks, see Angus D. Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks. War and Diplomacy during the Reign of Het'um II (1289–1307)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), especially 94–106, 171–83.

⁷² Bellarmino Bagatti, Michele Piccirillo and Alberto Prodomo, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in Gethsemane*, trans. L. Sciberras (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975), 39; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 3: 302, 304. The monks of the monastery in the early twelfth century possessed a relic of the True Cross, and perhaps fragments from Calvary, the Holy Sepulchre, the manger in Bethlehem and the Virgin's tomb.

⁷³ Stewart, *Armenian Kingdom*, 99–100.

⁷⁴ For more on this topic, Stewart, *Armenian Kingdom*, 81–2, and note 69. The story is given by an anonymous continuator of the thirteenth-century historian Smbat Sparapet, but not all sources agree on that matter. For this topic, see Dickran Kouymjian, 'The Right Hand of St Gregory and other Armenian Relics', in *Les objets de la mémoire. Pour*

Nevertheless, the passage that registers the king of Armenia's selection of relics is as stimulating as puzzling, because it states that the king kept the death sentence Pilate gave Christ written on lambskin in an abbey of 'white monks' on a certain island below the sea, next to Armenia.⁷⁵ The extract, I believe, refers to the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, and the nearby island is Cyprus. The abbey of white monks – i.e. white canons – is the Premonstratensian abbey of Bellapaïs in northern Cyprus, which, since the end of the thirteenth century had established strong ties with the Cilician-Armenian aristocracy.⁷⁶ Armenian royalty – He'tum I and He'tum II – are said to have entered the monastery in 1270 and 1293, as did He'tum, count of Gorigos, as a lay brother in 1305.⁷⁷ The issue remains open as to whether He'tum II, who was a supporter of the Franciscans, would have deposited such an important relic in a Premonstratensian abbey, let alone whether in 1306 the canons of Bellapaïs sided with the usurper Amaury of Tyre against King Henry II and his favourite Order, the Franciscans.⁷⁸ Did He'tum II donate the relic to Bellapaïs before he was immersed in things Franciscan? What is also striking is that, on the one hand, the author of the *Notabilia de passione* refers to the *rex Cipri* in these excerpts, but on the other hand, when it comes to naming the island on this occasion, he omits to do so and simply calls it *quaddam insula*. Does this indicate limited geographical knowledge on the part of the author, or of the fifteenth-century copyists of the work? Did the writer of the *Notabilia* hastily copy different catalogues of relics and fail to notice that *Cipri* and the *quaddam insula infra mare iuxta Armeniam* were one and the same place? Whatever the case, what matters is that a hitherto unnoticed Passion relic has been unveiled, kept in the prominent Premonstratensian abbey of Bellapaïs.

In contrast to Pilatus' judicial sentence, we do not know how the king of Cyprus' relics might have ended up in Cyprus, but one possibility might be the sack of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 and the dispersal of precious relics across Christendom;⁷⁹ or

une approche comparatiste des reliques et de leur culte, eds. Philippe Borgeaud and Youri Volokhine (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 221–46 (225–6).

⁷⁵ The document containing Jesus' sentence is described in the *Notabilia* as made of lambskin with red hair. Its text was written in Hebrew, and contained six lines in Pilate's hand, together with 12 verses, each one written by a different chief priest. The document bore six seals of white wax that were impressed on its inner side and had various shapes. One of the seals was that of Pilate, another of Jerusalem's [Jewish?] community, and the remainder belonged to different individuals. See Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 1–2, 32 (no. 20), 33 (no. 21).

⁷⁶ A citation of Christ's death sentence is traced elsewhere in the apocryphal text. A different passage observes that the relic was 'in the care of the king of Armenia and was kept in a certain abbey of white monks, beyond Greater Armenia, on a particular island in the sea, and was shown to anyone devoutly asking for it', thus suggesting that the object was not on public display (Appendix: 1). Surprisingly, the same excerpt informs us that St Nudus saw the item on a pilgrimage he made (apparently to Bellapaïs). Colker, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 4, 33 (no. 22).

⁷⁷ Nicholas Coureas, 'Lusignan Cyprus and Lesser Armenia, 1195–1375', *Επετηρίς του Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών* 21 (1995): 33–71 (36, 40); Coureas, *Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195–1312*, 204; Coureas, *Latin Church in Cyprus, 1313–1378*, 411; Philippe Plagnieux and Thierry Souldard, 'L'abbaye de Bellapaïs', in *L'art gothique en Chypre*, eds. Jean-Bernard de Vaivre and Philippe Plagnieux (Paris: De Boccard, 2006), 190–217 (192). Even though He'tum of Gorigos eventually entered a Premonstratensian abbey, he did not hesitate to sojourn in the Carthusian convent of Vauvert in Paris between 1300 and 1303. See Stewart, *Armenian Kingdom*, 94, 157, note 399.

⁷⁸ Olympios, for instance, questions He'tum II's close relations with the abbey and underscores the latter's liking for the Franciscans: Olympios, *Building the Sacred*, 321–2, note 570, with extensive bibliography on the topic.

⁷⁹ For instance, the Latin Emperor of Constantinople, Baldwin I (r. 1204–5), sent many of the relics he found in the imperial palace to various potentates in Western Europe to buy their sympathy. His successor, Baldwin II (r. 1228–61), due to the financial straits of his kingdom, had to pawn or sell some relics of the Passion. See Freeman, *Holy Bones*, 129–30. For the sale of relics by Byzantine emperors when the empire was in crisis during the fourteenth century, see also Sophia Mergiali-Sahas, 'An Ultimate Wealth for Inauspicious Times: Holy Relics in Rescue of Manuel II Palaeologus' Reign', *Byzantion* 76 (2006): 264–75.

through the visit of Henry II to the Holy Land, where he was crowned king of Jerusalem in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Tyre on 15 August 1286;⁸⁰ or, perhaps, with the Fall of Acre in 1291.⁸¹ In connection with this, another viable explanation presents itself: the Templars. With the trial of the Templars, which took place in 1310–11 in Nicosia and resulted in the dissolution of the Order in March 1312, relics changed hands.⁸² One example is the head of St Euphemia, which we know, before it was dispatched to Rhodes and Rome, was in Atlit (Château Pèlerin) from as early as 1231, and then in Cyprus in 1291.⁸³ Moreover, a copper cross that was said to be made from the tub or trough in which Christ was bathed, and most possibly came from the Temple Church at Acre, was also documented in Nicosia in 1291 and later passed to the Hospitallers.⁸⁴

The Royal Chapel at Pyrga: a chapel made for relics (?)

There are some potential hints of the relics referred to by the Franciscans in a surviving fresco in Cyprus. The so-called Royal Chapel at Pyrga in Larnaca is attributed to the sponsorship of a Lusignan royal couple by virtue of the depiction of a king and queen kneeling at the feet of the Crucified Christ (Figures 2 and 3, 6). The church also exhibits the Lusignan coats of arms and those of the kingdom of Jerusalem on the transverse ribs of the vault, thus intimating its royal foundation. Today, the tiny church, in addition to ‘Royal’, is also attributed to St Catherine in its dedication, but both designations were given at a later stage.⁸⁵ In 1899, Camille Enlart read a fragmentary painted inscription on the interior west wall which memorialised the dedication of the chapel to the ‘Passion of our Lord’ and provided the date of its decoration, the year 1421.⁸⁶ The

⁸⁰ ‘Chronique de Templier de Tyr (1242–1309)’, in *Gestes des Chiprois. Recueil de chroniques françaises écrite en Orient aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles (Philippe de Navarre & Gérard de Monréal)*, ed. Gaston Raynaud (Geneva: Imprimerie Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1887), 139–334 (218–22, §§ 435–9); Hill, *History of Cyprus*, 2: 180–1; Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, vol. 4: *The Cities of Acre and Tyre with Addenda and Corrigenda to Volumes I–III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 38, 52, 116, 185.

⁸¹ For example, in Acre under siege, the commander of the Templars, Theobald Gaudin, embarked for Sidon and Cyprus, carrying with him treasures and relics of the Order. Hill, *History of Cyprus*, 2: 187, 188.

⁸² Especially if we consider that Henry II was in conflict with the Templars, who openly supported his brother, Amaury of Tyre, under the throne (1306). See Hill, *History of Cyprus*, 2: 202–3; Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 121, 136. The Templars had been held under arrest since 1308 by Amaury who tried not to treat them harshly but had to comply with the pope’s orders. The proceedings against them in Cyprus started in May 1310, but the hearing began in May 1311, when King Henry was in power once again. In 1311, the pope ordered a new trial, but it is not known if that trial had been concluded or not. Hill, *History of Cyprus*, 2: 233–6.

⁸³ Since it was seen at this point by pilgrims. See Henri V. Michelant and Gaston Raynaud, eds., *Itinéraires à Jérusalem et descriptions de la Terre Sainte aux XIe, XIIe & XIIIe siècles* (Geneva: Imprimerie Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1882), 91, 180; Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus*, vol. 1: *A–K (Excluding Acre and Jerusalem)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 71; Thomasz Borowski and Christopher Gerrard, ‘Constructing Identity in the Middle Ages: Relics, Religiosity, and the Military Orders’, *Speculum* 92, no. 4 (2017): 1056–1100 (1096, note 74).

⁸⁴ ‘Excidii Aconis Gestorum Collectio, II’, in *Excidii Aconis gestorum collectio. Magister Thadeus civis Neapolitanus Ystoria de desolatione et conculatione civitatis Aconensis et tocus Terre Sancta*, ed. Robert B.C. Huygens. *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis* 202 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 47–96 (91–3); Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 199; Pringle, *Churches of the Crusader Kingdom*, 4: 171–2.

⁸⁵ Andreas Stylianou and Judith A. Stylianou, *The Painted Churches of Cyprus: Treasures of Byzantine Art* (Nicosia: A.G. Leventis Foundation, 1997), 428–32 (428).

⁸⁶ ‘ceste chappele // [en] l’onor de Dieu et de // I [a P]a[-ssi]on de nostre [Seigneur]’. See Camille Enlart, *Gothic Art and the Renaissance in Cyprus*, trans. David Hunt (London: Trigraph, 1987), 328. According to Enlart, the inscription was painted in white letters on a green background.



Figure 2. Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Larnaca, exterior from the south-west. Source: Author's photograph, by permission of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus.

latest literature has challenged the year given by Enlart and suggests a fourteenth-century date instead.⁸⁷ Enlart's reading of the chapel's name, however, must be correct, not only because its frescoes included an extensive Passion cycle on the east wall, but also because, at the western door, above the lintel, the tympanum of an exterior pointed blind arch is used to depict the Man of Sorrows, an image that is a synecdoche

⁸⁷ The first scholar to throw doubt on a fifteenth-century date and entertain a late thirteenth/early fourteenth-century one was Christina Spanou, but she did not pursue her view further: Christina Spanou, 'Η τέχνη στη μητροπολιτική περιφέρεια Κιτίου από τον 6^ο έως το 15^ο αιώνα. Μνημειακή ζωγραφική και φορητές εικόνες', in *Η κατά Κίτιον αιογραφική τέχνη*, eds. Costas Gerasimou, Kyriakos Papaioakeim and Christina Spanou (Larnaca: Holy Bishopric of Kition, 2002), 21–55 (49). She was followed by Jens Wollesen, who proposed that the frescoes were made in the first third of the fourteenth century, and after 1310: Jens T. Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters on Cyprus: The Frescoes in the Royal Chapel at Pyrga* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 109. Annemarie Weyl Carr took her cue from Wollesen and suggested a mid fourteenth-century date, that is, in Hugh IV's reign (1324–59): Annemarie Weyl Carr, 'The Murals of the Bema and the Naos: The Paintings of the Late Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in *Asinou Across Time: Studies in Architecture and Murals of the Panagia Phorvriotissa, Cyprus*, eds. Annemarie Weyl Carr and Andreas Nicolaidēs (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2012), 211–310 (307, note 360). More recently Stephen Lucey argued for Peter I Lusignan and that the decoration took place between 1357 and 1367: Stephen J. Lucey, 'The Royal Chapel at Pyrga: Art, Agency, and Appropriation in Fourteenth-Century Cyprus', *Royal Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2018): 63–91 (89–91). Dimitrios Minasidis also contends that the chapel was decorated with the frescoes when Peter I Lusignan was in power: Dimitrios Minasidis, 'Hunting with Falcons and Its Symbolism: A Depiction in the Royal Chapel at Pyrga', in *The Art and Archaeology of Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus (1192–1571): Recent Research and New Discoveries*, eds. Michalis Olympios and Maria Parani (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 63–79 (65, note 8). For a different viewpoint, echoing Enlart's proposal and dating the chapel between 1421 and 1424, see Vladimir Agrigoroaei, 'The "Double-Sided" Chapel at Pyrga (Cyprus, 1421–1424)', *museIKON* 6 (2022): 21–80 (24–31).



Figure 3. Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Larnaca, east wall: Passion scenes and transverse rib of the eastern vault, displaying painted arms. Source: Photograph by courtesy of Michalis Kouloumis, by permission of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus



Figure 4. Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Larnaca, pointed blind arch above the western door, showing fragments of a painted cross (outlined) on the tympanum. Source: Author's photograph, by permission of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

of the devotion to the Passion – one can still discern traces of the cross (Figure 4).⁸⁸ Such blind arches above the western entrance usually indicated the dedication of the church to the saint/feast portrayed. The chapel, therefore, must have been dedicated to the Passion of Christ as Enlart argued, or, possibly, to the Holy Cross. It is not by chance, I believe, that in the graffiti left on the walls of the chapel by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century pilgrims, the word *cruce* is incised on some occasions.⁸⁹

When Enlart visited the chapel he witnessed remains of additional structures, perhaps of a palace, which have since vanished.⁹⁰ Based on Enlart's testimony, scholars assume that the chapel was part of a larger complex that possibly belonged to a royal manor/palace, while Jens Wollesen suggests that it was 'inaccessible for public worship and exclusively meant to serve the *private devotional* needs of its Western royal clients'.⁹¹ Furthermore, it has been argued that the church functioned as a royal funerary chapel,⁹² a chapel that offered a 'salvation programme',⁹³ or 'an ex-voto' that invoked the True Cross to save the people of Cyprus from the outbreaks of plague.⁹⁴ At this point I would like to propose another function for this miniscule sacred building, that is, a royal chapel aimed at housing relics. It was not unheard of for monarchs to build special chapels for their relics, just as the Byzantine emperors, Charlemagne and Louis IX did. What is more, the example of Charles IV (1316–78), Holy Roman Emperor, is particularly relevant, as he had a special devotion to Passion relics and built the royal fortress and palace of Karlštejn to safeguard his collection of them. The castle, which was completed in 1365, had a tower in its uppermost floor that contained a Chapel of the Holy Cross, which housed his extraordinary relics, and to which only a privileged few could gain access. The altar area had a grilled enclosure for the imperial relics, and on the altar wall the central image was a Crucifixion, just as in Pyrga.⁹⁵ Might we think of

⁸⁸ The image has been identified by the author as a Man of Sorrows in an unpublished essay written in 2005: A. Andronikou, 'Παλατινά παρεκκλησία εκτός Κωνσταντινουπόλεως', MA essay for the Seminar Nikos Oikonomides, University of Athens (Athens, 2005), 35, note 159. Wollesen, who produced the first monograph on the monument, observed that the western exterior tympanum was decorated with frescoes and identified the traces of an illegible inscription, but he did not notice that the actual fresco was a Man of Sorrows. One can still discern the traces of the cross on a green background and white illegible letters. Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters*, 3–4. Minasidis has read the image as a crucifixion and also recognised at least two haloes and the crown of a king, but I do not see those details in this fragmentary painting. In my view, the oversized cross in relation to the size of the blind arch hints at a Man of Sorrows. See Dimitrios Minasidis, 'Τίμιος Σταυρός: Η ταύτιση με το χωριό Πυργά (Πυρκά)', *Βυζαντινά* 36 (2019): 67–102 (91–3). Vladimir Agrigoroaei maintains that the chapel was dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin, but it also had a special reverence for the Cross and Christ's Passion, because of its close ties and geographical proximity to the Stavrovouni monastery. See Agrigoroaei, "Double-Sided", 30, 59–62, 66–9.

⁸⁹ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 332–3; James Schryver and Christopher Schabel re-read the graffiti inscriptions that were misread by Enlart and suggested that the authors of the inscriptions were pilgrims visiting the Monastery of Stavrovouni (the Monastery of the Cross). According to the graffiti, in 1481, the monastery was administered by a Franciscan brother named Bartholomeus. James G. Schryver and Christopher Schabel, "The Graffiti in the "Royal Chapel" of Pyrga", in *Report of the Department of Antiquities Cyprus 2003* (Nicosia: Cyprus Department of Antiquities, 2004), 327–34 (331, 333).

⁹⁰ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 327.

⁹¹ Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 333; Jean-Bernard de Vaivre, 'La chapelle royale de Pyrga', in *L'art gothique en Chypre*, eds. Jean-Bernard de Vaivre and Philippe Plagnieux (Paris: De Boccard, 2006), 297–304 (300, 304); Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters*, 28.

⁹² Melita Emmanuel had already observed that the programme places an emphasis on the Passion: Melita Emmanuel, 'Monumental Painting in Cyprus during the Last Phase of the Lusignan Dynasty, 1374–1487', in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, eds. Nancy Patterson-Ševčenko and Christopher Moss (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 243.

⁹³ Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters*, 28.

⁹⁴ Lucey, 'Royal Chapel at Pyrga', 63, 81, 88, 89–90.

⁹⁵ Some small cavities in the walls indicate that their use as slots for small relics. Hahn, *Passion Relics*, 91–6.



Figure 5. Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Larnaca, east wall: Passion scenes and three apertures on the east, south and north walls. Source: Author's photograph, by permission of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

some of the three openings on the east part of the Pyrga chapel as possible niches that contained holy vessels-cum-relics (Figure 5)?⁹⁶

Wollesen's analytical study of the painting programme of the chapel has pinpointed several associations of the iconographic choices with the Franciscans, especially in the east wall, which functioned as a frescoed altarpiece and included the royal portraits and those of a bishop in the Crucifixion and Lamentation respectively.⁹⁷ Wollesen has also suggested that the couple represented are King Henry II and his queen, Constance of Sicily (1304/6–after 1344), a choice that could, perhaps, explain the Franciscan preferences in the programme, since, as we have already seen, Henry was a fervent Franciscan supporter. But, of course, in addition to any Franciscan connotations as avowed by Wollesen, the dedication of the chapel itself to the Cross or the Passion could also account for an extensive Passion cycle. Be that as it may, if one looks at the Crucifixion, which plays the most important role in the chapel's decoration, one will notice that Christ's cross is fixed into a bell-shaped whitish rock, with seven plateaus and a hole at its centre (Figure 6). The plateaus may not overlap with the seven angles that covered its periphery that the Franciscan text mentions, but it is possible the rock/cave at the Pyrga Crucifixion

⁹⁶ Wollesen discusses a niche that was opened in the south wall and destroyed a series of standing saints, and another similar one on the north wall. These, however, were not niches but windows that were filled during repairs conducted in the early twentieth century. See Athanasios Papageorgiou, *The 'Royal Chapel' of Pyrga: A Guide*, trans. Andreas Stylianou (n.p., n.d.), 3. Enlart also maintains that these were windows, not niches: Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 327.

⁹⁷ Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters*, 48–50, 52. Long before Wollesen, Silvain Beraud had suggested that the chapel pertained to a Franciscan monastery, and that the owners of the chapel were not members of the royal family, but the Franciscan Order: Silvain Beraud, 'Terre Sainte de Chypre', *Κυπριακαὶ Σπουδαί* 50 (1986): 144.



Figure 6. Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Larnaca, east wall: Crucifixion with supplicants. Source: Author's photograph, by permission of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

suggests a physical object/relic (or a fragment of it) in the Lusignans' collection, perhaps the one mentioned in the *Notabilia*.⁹⁸ The placement of the royal couple in such a way as to flank the white rock may have evoked the actual object in the minds of the worshippers (including the royal couple themselves), thus helping them to focus on meditation and prayer, by inviting them to participate actively in the sacred drama.⁹⁹ By the same token, Annemarie Weyl Carr has pointed to the way in which the eyes of the royal couple are fastened on the *suppedaneum* of the cross in the Royal Chapel, which, as we have already seen, had a special tie with the royal family, and she perceptively indicated that the genuflecting king and queen appealed to the Tochni *palladium* for protection.¹⁰⁰ Intriguingly, in the Lamentation, which is conspicuously depicted below the Crucifixion, the mottled reddish marble slab (*lithos*), upon which Christ was anointed after the Deposition from the Cross, renders with precision another relic, the unction stone, which at that time was revered in Constantinople (Figure 7).¹⁰¹ It may be that the two most important scenes in the Royal Chapel flaunt these three Passion relics,

⁹⁸ In the Deposition of Christ from the Cross, which is painted next to the Crucifixion, the cross is not fixed in the same white rock, but in different ground, brown in colour, prompting us to think that the choice of white for the cave may have referred to an extant relic.

⁹⁹ Hahn, *Passion Relics*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Annemarie Weyl Carr, 'The Holy Icons: A Lusignan Asset?', in *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, eds. Daniel H. Weiss and Lisa Mahoney (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 313–35 (314–15).

¹⁰¹ Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters*, 50–1. The stone of unction was transferred to Constantinople in 1196 from Ephesus and is known to have remained in the Byzantine capital until the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453. The bibliography on the unction stone and its fate is substantial: see, most recently, Ivan Drpić, 'Manuel I Komnenos and the Stone of Unction', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 43, no. 1 (2019): 60–82.



Figure 7. Royal Chapel, Pyrga, Larnaca, east wall: Passion scenes. Photo: Courtesy of Michalis Kouloumis, by permission of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus

which are foregrounded by the presence of the supplicants near them, who are close to and intimately associated with the relics. Does this interplay of Passion relics amount to a Lusignan visual gambit to equate the importance of the white-stone relic and Christ's foot-piece with that of the unction stone, thus allowing the Lusignans to stake a claim as owners of relics as glorious as those owned by the Byzantine emperors? However, the inclusion of the white-stone relic in the Royal Chapel does not inevitably connect the sponsorship of the chapel to Henry II: it is likely that the king would have passed down his prized relics to succeeding generations.

Further, the cycle of the Life of the Virgin and her parents on the western bay of the south wall may also correlate with relics of the Virgin or her parents that were preserved in the chapel.¹⁰² Let us recall the testimony of Felix Faber, who, in a village named Holy Cross, not far from Stavrovouni, visited a Latin church and was shown the arm of St Anne and a nail that had fixed Christ to the cross.¹⁰³ Dimitrios Minasidis has identified the village of the Holy Cross mentioned by pilgrims with Pyrga and I concur with his view. He also recognised the 'Latin church' cited by Faber as the Royal Chapel.¹⁰⁴ Faber's testimony demonstrates that the chapel still held relics in the late fifteenth century, although it must have suffered destruction (and perhaps changed hands and function) after the Mamluk invasion of 1426.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² The scenes from the Life of the Virgin include the Birth of Mary, the Blessing of Mary by the Priests, the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, and an unidentified scene (perhaps the Betrothal of the Virgin?): Wollesen, *Patrons and Painters*, 61–5.

¹⁰³ Hassler, ed., *Fratrīs Felicis Fabri Evagatorium*, 1: 177; Cobham, ed., *Excerpta Cypria*, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Minasidis, 'Hunting with Falcons', 67–8, and note 15; Minasidis, 'Τίμιος Σταυρός', 91–3.

¹⁰⁵ It is possible that the Mamluk army plundered the church after they had defeated King Janus' forces on 7 July 1426: Enlart, *Gothic Art*, 326.

Conclusion

The Franciscan apocryphal texts, and the evidence of the Royal Chapel, offer us new perspectives on the ways in which the Cypriot kings curated relics of the Passion. The instruments of the Passion (*arma Christi*), like the Cross, were regarded as symbols of sovereignty and victory, particularly by emperors and kings.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, their importance was doubly significant for the political aspirations of the Lusignan who sought to bolster their divine legitimacy as kings of Jerusalem after the demise of the Crusader States in the East at the close of the thirteenth century. Given the Franciscan references to Passion relics in the possession of the king of Cyprus, the Lusignans' group of Passion relics must have been known to Western authors: the two Franciscan narratives make plain an aspect of relic-collecting in Cypriot history that would otherwise not have been known. In addition to revealing what these relics were and the identification of their royal collector as Henry II Lusignan, in this study I have tried to uncover a plausible representation of one of these relics in the Royal Chapel at Pyrga and suggest that this tiny church may have been erected with the aim of housing sacred relics – perhaps, originally, Passion relics. So, too, the connection to royalty in relic-related imagery at Pyrga serves further to substantiate some of the information presented by the Franciscan apocrypha, thus giving those records a degree of validity in their own Franciscan milieu. More importantly, the *Exempla aliqua notabilia* and the *Notabilia de passione Christi* position the Lusignan kingdom of Cyprus within the contemporary Western royal predilection for Passion relics and the construction of chapels to house them.

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¹⁰⁶ Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2: *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, trans. Janet Seligman (London: Lund Humphries, 1972), 190; Hahn, *Passion Relics*, 8.

Appendix. Extracts from the *Notabilia de passione Christi*

I use Colker's transcriptions, 'Medieval Latin Apocryphon', 21–65. Colker largely employs two fifteenth-century manuscripts for his transcriptions; however, he does not provide the exact foliation for each section, which is as follows: Durham, North Carolina, Duke University, Perkins Library, MS 51, folios 18r–33v, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 63 (Summary Catalogue 21637), folios. 1r–32r.

1 Que sententia adhuc reverentissime custoditur a rege Armeniorum et tenetur in quadam abbatia monachorum extra Armeniam maiorem in quadam insula in mare, et ostenditur devote petentibus eam. De qua sententia dicit Sanctus Nudus quod viderat illam pellem scriptam cum sententia Christi tempore sue peregrinationis, et dicit quod ista sententia Christi in die iudicii ostendetur coram toto humano genere in confusionem condempnantium Christum. Et illi qui subscripserunt se tunc erunt ibi prope cartam, ita quod videbitur palam et ab omnibus cognoscetur quod tales fuerunt.

2 Et extunc remansit virgo Maria sine velo in capite quasi una fatua. Et tunc alie mulieres et domine circumstantes proiecerunt sibi velum ad cohoperiendum sibi capud. Et ille, qui ascendit tunc ad crucem ad ponendum velum predictum circa Christum, per scalam cecidit in terram et mortuus est. Et iterum per virtutem divinam revixit. Pannus ille possitus circa lumbos Christi fuit quinque brachiorum. Quem pannum reverentissime tenet et habet cum suis reliquis rex Cipri.

3 Nota etiam quod dicitur in biblia Hebreorum quod tabula illa de oliva posita super crucem Christi fuit de prima oliva que fructum attulit in mundo isto post diluvium. Et fuit de oliva illa de qua columba emissa a Nohe de arca portavit ramum olive ad ispam archam. Quam olivam iste Noe post diluvium incidit. Et de ipsa oliva fuit facta ista tabula ad iurandum, ut dictum est. Quam tabulam Salomon tenebat in templo cum magna dignitate. [Sed erat honestum valde] Quam tabulam rex Cipry reverentissime conservat et tenet cum suis reliquiis.

4 Rex Francie habet coronam spinarum positam super capud Christi, item ferrum lancee quo apperit latus Christi mortui in cruce, item maximam partem ligni crucis Yhesu Christi. Rex vero Cipri habet illum lapidem album septem angulorum perforatum et ad modum campane factum ubi fuit crux Christi infixam, item domine nostre velum quod fuit positum circa lumbos Christi in cruce, item tabulam illam scriptam 'Yhesus Nazarenus rex Iudeorum' positam super crucem Christi. Item unum de flagelis, cum quo flagellatus fuit ipse Christus, tenet quidam rex, cuius nomen non recordabatur sacerdos qui hoc retulit. Et ipsum fuit osculatus.

5 Rex Armenie Cristianus habet funem illum de pillis ligatum ad collum Christi, item petiam illam camissie ligatam ante oculos Christi, item unam de illis furcis cum quibus levata fuit in altum crux Christi quando Christus fuit confixus manibus tantum stante pede crucis in terra, item canam illam in qua fuit ligata spongia cum aceto et possita ad hos Christi. Item tenet in quaddam abbatia monachorum alborum in quaddam insula infra mare iuxta Armeniam pellem illam ubi est scripta sententia illa data super Christum, ex qua sententia fuit postea crucifixus.

6 Item in sancto Dionixio, ubi seppeliuntur reges Francie, est unus clavus qui fuit infixus in unam manum Christi Yhesu. Item rex Buemie in India Christianus habet clavum illum qui fuit infixus in pedes Christi, qui est longior alliis bene per quatuor digitos. Item princeps quidam Armenie habet in quadam capsula eburnea cohoperata de cristallo pillos evulsos de barba Christi. Et sunt bene pilli et sunt quaxi pilli rubei. Item comes Arabs, qui est in insula Cipri, habet illam sedem super quam fuit positus et illusus Yhesus Christus. Item in Aquisgrani, ubi coronantur imperatores in Alemania, est linteus quo precinsit se Christus quando lavit pedes discipulorum suorum; item camisia domine nostre est in ecclesia maiori ubi iacet sanctus Charolus magnus.