

Show reminds of destruction of Christian heritage

The deliberate destruction of the Christian cultural heritage in Turkish-occupied northern Cyprus was highlighted by an exhibition of paintings and photographs of northern churches which opened in Nicosia on 8 January. Education Minister Ouranios Ioannides joined with Archbishop Chrysostomos and Greek Ambassador Christos Panagopoulos at the opening in lambasting Turkish conduct in the occupied area as contrary to all the civilized norms as prescribed by international law.

The exhibition features 520 churches in the occupied area, many of them now ransacked, denuded of their icons and other holy relics, and desecrated in various other ways, including conversion into stables and even nightclubs. It was organized by the Byzantine Academy of Cyprus and includes the work of 13 foreign artists, who used the Academy's unique collection photographs of the churches to paint their pictures.

Mr Ioannides said that the aim of exhibition "is to inform, make people more sensitive and to mobilize them in a decisive and effective way in connection with this very important aspect of the Cyprus tragedy, the destruction of our cultural heritage". Referring to the history of Cyprus as a bridge between West and East, he described how the rich Byzantine tradition came to create artistic masterpieces in Orthodox churches, notably icons, murals, wooden carvings and other relics.

The Minister continued: "It is this cultural heritage, many major examples of which



Photo: Klaus Gallas

• Desecrated heritage... The plundered Church of the Virgin Mandryna in the Turkish-occupied area.

survived in the occupied part of Cyprus which the Turkish Attila is destroying. For Attila and the settlers from Anatolia, the cultural heritage of Cyprus is an item of commerce and easy profit. The Turks believe that in this way they will alter the cultural character of the occupied territories—a futile belief, however, because as our history has proved, Cyprus 'has changed many masters but not its heart'."

In a forceful passage, Mr Ioannides said that churches "are symbols of the religious and historic memory of the Greek Christians, who were expelled savagely from their ancestral

hearths. These symbols carry forward from generation to generation the almighty and immemorial values of Greco-Christian civilization, and are at the same time monuments of unique and inestimable value for the world's cultural heritage."

The Minister concluded that the 520 churches portrayed in the exhibition "sigh under the weight of the savage Turkish occupation, awaiting the blessed day of the return of the legitimate inhabitants of our temporarily occupied land—something that will come about sooner or later". □

Notes & News

● Newly elected independent **Mayor of Nicosia** Michalakis Zampelas on 2 January launched a month-long campaign to improve the city's cleanliness. He also announced that he would give priority to solving the capital's traffic problems through the construction of new car parks, pavements and pedestrian crossings and the provision of better lighting and sign-posts.

● Vassos Pyrgos took office on 2 January as **Telecommunications Commissioner** of Cyprus, charged with overseeing the liberalization of telephone and postal services in the context of the country's prospective accession to the European Union.

● A new campaign to "promote enlightenment" on the status of the Turkish-occupied city of **Famagusta** and its modern district of Varosha was promised on 3 January by newly elected Mayor Kikis Kazamias of the left-wing AKEL Party. Mr Kazamias recalled that relevant UN Security Council resolutions ruled out the resettlement of Famagusta/Varosha by other than the original inhabitants, most of whom had been displaced by invading Turkish forces in 1974.

● Issued on 9 January, a report on excavations by a team from the University of Edinburgh at the 5,000-year-old **Souskiou-Laona burial site** near Paphos gave details of the discovery of what is probably the earliest imported faience found in any Mediterranean island. Carried out in mid-2001, the dig at the Middle Chalcolithic site (c.2800-3400 BC) focused on a cemetery located on a limestone outcrop, where 42 tombs were excavated. The work resulted in the establishment of the first-ever plan of a Chalcolithic cemetery.

● Most of Cyprus was blanketed by **heavy snow** from 9 January, as the island was caught in a blast of cold air straight from the Russian steppes. Before and after the snowfall, heavy rainfall provided a further boost to water reservoirs, which was described a "very important" by Agriculture, Natural



• Winter sport... Skiing in the Troodos Mountains

Resources and Environment Minister Costas Themistocleous.

● Official **trade statistics** issued on 9 January showed that in the first eight months of 2001 Cyprus' trade deficit, before invisibles such as earnings from tourism, rose to C£1,299.1 million compared with C£1,108.8 million in the same period in 2000. Imports totalled C£1,729.9 million in January-August (up C£214.7 million), while exports increased from C£406.4 million to C£430.8 million.

● Antiquities Department Director Sophocles

Hadjisavvas confirmed on 10 January that the Government was going ahead with building a **new archaeological museum**, which would be Cyprus' biggest cultural project of the 21st century. Construction is scheduled to start in 2004 at an estimated cost of up to C£40 million, the selected location being the present site of the Nicosia General Hospital, which is to be demolished and transferred to new premises near Latsia.

● London-trained legal expert Stalo Papaioannou took office on 15 January as Cyprus' **Registrar of Companies and Official Receiver**. Hitherto Assistant Registrar, Mrs Papaioannou said that Cyprus' prospective accession to the European Union represented "an additional challenge" in her new post.

● Figures released on 29 January by the Eurostat statistical office showed that Cyprus as a region ranks **third in per capita GDP** among all the regions of prospective new EU member states. First and second places are held respectively by the Prague region of the Czech Republic and the Bratislava region of Slovakia. Constituting a single region in EU terms, Cyprus comes third with 85 per cent of the average EU per capita GDP. □

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