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ARTICLES AND STUDIES

GEORGIAN CHURCHES IN LARNAKA DISTRICT (ALAMINOS/SOPHTADES AREA, CYPRUS)

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Introduction

Georgian monasteries in Cyprus are mentioned several times in Georgian written sources. The earliest of these is a colophon of one of the Georgian manuscripts recently discovered at St. Katherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai. It was provided in 980 by Ioane Zosime, a well-known Georgian religious figure and hymnographer. The inscription mentions that handwritten books recently translated into Georgian were received from Cyprus by a monastery in Sinai. It appears from the source that in the 10th century, at least by its last quarter, Cyprus had already been settled by Georgian clergy who translated and sent their translations to the Georgian monasteries in other countries.¹ The Georgian monastery of Gialia/Galia, which was referred to as panagia *chrysoialiotissa*, had been founded by David Kuropalates (†1001) in the 960s -970s, as evidenced by archaeological excavations. It seems that Gialia Monastery has methochions on the south part of Cyprus, which is evidenced by historical sources, mentioning Georgian monasteries in the area of Alaminos.² This basic data is in logical convergence with local folk and Cypriot churchmen's tradition identifying remains of buildings of this area with Georgians. Georgians on Cyprus were mentioned also in the letter of pope Clement V (1st of February, 1306) to Robert the Norman, bishop of Paphos: "it has come to the attention of our Apostolate, in a trustworthy report, that a certain

¹ I. Gagoshidze, D. Mindorashvili, G. Gagoshidze, *Gialia, the monastery of Georgians in Cyprus*. Tbilisi 2014 (in Georgian).

² S. Latchkebiani, *Georgians in the searches of Stephan Luzignian and Archimandrite Kyprianos*; *Analıs* № 8, p. 464, 2013 (in Georgian).

Jorgianus (Georgians) and some Greek schismatics, calling themselves abbots of the monasteries of Galia, Lacrona, and St. Sabbas of the diocese of Paphos, wrongly seized these monasteries and, to the offence of the Celestial King, retain what they seized”.³

According to the work of Etienne de Lusignan (there is the exact indication about the existence of Georgian churches in Alaminos’ area in his work: Etienne de Lusignan, Description of the island of Cyprus, Paris, 1580) and Archimandrite Kyprianos, also, according to folk traditions from the village Alaminos, Georgian scholars suggest, that it might be in Alaminos were the lands of Georgian monasteries were located: “In Alaminos there is only one proof – the ruins of St. George’s Church, which was belonged to Georgians according to the local oral traditions”.⁴ We are able to think, that Alaminos was the land of Gialia Georgian Monastery in Cyprus,⁵ because Alaminos is a rich agricultural region. The Gialia Monastery itself is situated in the north-west part of the island. There are not enough agricultural lands near the Gialia Monastery; on the other hand, village Alaminos (district of Larnaca) was the most developed agricultural area and it is till today.

We know from the historical sources, that the annual income of Gialia Monastery was 300 (three hundred) ducats, like a Kykkos Monastery.⁶ So, such a huge annual income would be based only on the good agricultural conditions.

Excavations of the Ruins of St. George Church in Alaminos

a) The first stage.

The ruins of St. George Monastery are situated in the southern part of Cyprus; three and half km. on the South-East part of village Alaminos (district of Larnaca); the church is located between the agricultural lands, near the village way, where 10 m. length of the North wall of the church was preserved. The almost totally damaged wall is bent 25° on the north-east side, on which the direction of church is based. The Church area is very damaged by the agricultural activities. It is clear, that the church building is abandoned during the centuries.

³ Schabel 2001, 339-340.

⁴ S. Latchkebiani, *Georgians in the searches of Stephan Luzignian and Archimandrite Kyprianos*; Anals, N8, p. 464, 2013 (in Georgian).

⁵ I. Gagoshidze, D. Mindorashvili, G. Gagoshidze, *Gialia, the monastery of Georgians in Cyprus*. Tbilisi 2014 (in Georgian).

⁶ S. Latchkebiani, S. Latchkebiani, *Monastery of Gialia and Georgians in the historiography of Cyprus*, Anals N5, 2009, p. 250 (in Georgian).

The East part of the Norther wall is 2 m. high from the earth level and 5 m. length, which is better preserved and was visible before starting the excavations, it is heavily damaged, mortar and stones are separated, thickness of the wall on this place is about 100 cm. (The west side wall thickness is 75 cm.). There are rebuilt two small buildings with the doors by the local people on this wall. In the west building is for keeping church oil and candles, in the east building is for keeping icons. There is presented cylindrical gritstone column (diameter – 44 cm., length – 140 cm.). Presumptively, column was the leg of church trapeza (table) into the temple.

We are able to see the plan of the west wall of the church in L8 and M8 squares of the excavation area. In the central part it is possible to see prints of stones on the mortar. This part like a step is aiding on the west side. Presumptively, it was the main entrance from the west. The length of threshold is 150 cm.

There is discovered the south-west corner of church (square N8) and whole south wall, which ends in M12 square. At the moment it is not able to clear the position of altar apse. There are two damaged stones connected with mortar in L12 square. These stones might be the part of altar apse structure.

It might also be noted here, that the church was built without foundation. On the plan level we can see the thickness of this wall is about 90 cm.

The wall is built by pieces of rock stones; the south part, which itself is north wall of church interior, is built better, than the other part, part of facade. On the south the different size stone layer has regular formation. Church interior was divided by the pilasters, two of them are remained partly in the K9 and K10 squares. There is discovered floor level of the church (170 cm. from zero point). Floor was revetment by the flat-manufacturing marble stones.

There is discovered oblong marble tile in the area of K10 and L10 squares, it was fixed on the floor by the mortar. There is presented one step sit-place between pilasters on the same side of the wall. Sit-place is well plastered by the mortar and then is polished. On the same area it is fixed second building layer's floor level, which is plastered by white mortar. There is placed rectangular parallelepiped formed well-manufacturing stone (30X35X40 cm.) in front of east pilaster, on the sit-place. This stone is plastered by white mortar like sit-place. The stone might be the part of altar window-cut.

There are presented the rests of staircase in the west, along the main entrance in the area of L9 and M9 squares. The staircase was revetment by flat-stones.

The west part of north wall is situated in the area of L7 square. There is not fixed corresponding south wall and its function is unclear.

There are presented fragments of the wall painting near the sit-place in the area of K10 square. Visible is local blue color, it might be the back view of compositions. There is also red color on one fragment.

After the excavations it is clear, that the Alamino St. George's Church had at least two entrances, one in the west and other in south wall; floor was revetment by flat and well-manufacturing marble stones, but later this floor was covered by mortar and damaged marble stone were used as grave walls around the church; the interior of church was covered by wall painting, in altar apse stood the church table based on cylindrical column.

Description of graves:

Graves were situated around the St. George church.

Graves are dated back to 14th – 16th cc.

Grave N 1

Grave N 1 is situated in *N10-square*.

The stone layer in grave is damaged, maybe during the agricultural works on area; the skull is cut, other bones are all over the grave, without anatomical system. There are presented pottery fragments in grave, by analyze of them, they might be the parts of two different vessels.

Grave is situated 30 cm. down from modern earth level.

Grave N 2

Grave N 2 is situated in *N10-square*.

Type of grave: stone box-burial;

Grave is along the south wall of church. The bones are very damaged and are concentrated in one corner of grave. The fragments of skull we can found in the east part of grave.

There are presented also fragments of pottery all area of grave, two different types of ceramics.

The size of grave:

The length – 150 cm; the width – 70 cm; the depth – 20 cm.

Grave N 3

Grave N 3 is situated in *O10-square* on the field.

Type of Grave is cist-grave.

Grave is built with middle-size, half-manufacturing stones, there were buried two persons in different time, on different levels.

Low level skeleton is buried with west position of head; it is lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth, hands are put on the breast, skull is damaged by falling down of grave stone; the length of skeleton is 151 cm;

There is found a ceramic bowl, inside brown glazed;

There is fixed second skeleton on the east part of the burial, which belongs later period, of course (first and second grave is divided by 16 cm. earth level); There are preserved only skull and breast part, the other and main part of skeleton, which was out of the grave borders, is lost.

The size of grave: length – 172 cm; the width – 44 cm; the depth – 42 cm.

Grave N 4

Grave N 4 is situated in *M8-square*.

Type of Grave – cist-grave;

There is presented child skeleton in grave. Oriented on WE. Lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth; Hands on the stomach, head is on west side position; bones are very much damaged; the skull is covered by 20 cm. length stones.

There is one a bit damaged light-blue glazed bowl on the left side in the grave, the fragments of the bowl is all over the grave area;

The size of grave:

The length – 60 cm; the width – 30 cm; the depth – 5 cm.

Grave N 5

Grave N 5 is situated in *K8/K9-squares*.

Type of grave: cist-grave.

There is presented skeleton (we think, child skeleton), oriented on WE. Lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth; Hands on the stomach, head is on west side position; Bones are much damaged. The bones down to pelvis are not preserved. There are three broken stones on the west side of grave, the length of stone is about 20 cm. Only skull is covered by these stones.

There are also fragments of red pottery.

Grave N 6

Grave N 6 is situated in *J10-square*

Type of grave is cist-grave, deceased is lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth; Hands on the stomach, head is on west side position;

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Grave is situated on the north side (about 103 cm.) of the north wall of St. George's Church; There was preserved cover construction of the grave (three flat-stone, half-manufacturing, size – 30X40 cm.);

The grave is individual, belongs to one person, child about 2 years old; the skeleton is joint anatomic. In the breast area is fixed one round bead.

There was white and green glazed ceramic bowls on area of the knees of the skeleton; the bowl is damaged by the grave-stones. The second ceramic dish (concentrated in the same area) was also damaged by grave-stones. Second ceramic is red-fabric and then light-red glazed, also fixed white lines on it.

After taking stones and bone materials there is fixed floor of the grave, which is small flat-lime stones with mortar.

The size of grave: length – 80 cm; the width – 18 cm; the depth – 24 cm;

Grave N 7

Grave N 7 is situated in *O10-square*.

The grave is much damaged; it is fixed 50 cm down from the modern earth level. There is preserved partly the skull, the fragments of the skull are over the stones; 25 cm. east part from the skull is fixed a ceramic bowl, inside white glazed.

Grave N 8

Grave N 8 is situated in *O10-square*.

The grave is fixed 65 cm. down from the modern earth level. Skeleton is buried with west position of head, it is lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth; it is cleaned up part of skeleton, till waist area. The rest part of skeleton is inside of the profile and it was not possible to clean area for the particular moment. There are not discovered any materials in the grave.

Grave N 9

Grave N 9 is situated in *O10-square*. The grave is cleaned 80 cm. down from the modern earth level. Skeleton is buried with west position of head, it is lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth; near the skull is fixed flat-stone; the legs of skeleton is situated inside the east profile. During the cleaning of grave are fixed several brownish burned fragments of ceramics (not glazed).

Grave N 10

Grave N 10 is situated in *N9-square*.

Type of grave: cist-grave

Grave is laid on W-O axis. It is a child grave, which is discovered at the south-west wall of St. George's Church. The bones are damaged, Skeleton is buried with west position of head, and it is lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth;

Inventory of the grave:

1. The copper coin was discovered in the breast area of skeleton;
2. three bone crosses, one steatite cross;
3. one bronze ring;
4. corrugated glass beads, cornelian beads, cylindrical glass bead;
5. There were found also two glazed ceramic bowls. One of them is situated on the east part of grave, second is situated on the right side of skeleton.

The size of grave:

The length – 80 cm; the width – 35 cm; the depth – 18 cm.

The length of skeleton is 57 cm.

Grave N 11

Grave N 11 is situated in *K7-square*.

The type: pit-grave;

The grave was situated along the north wall, oriented on WE. Skeleton might be belonged to the adult person. Hands on the stomach. On the throat area is discovered one copper coin.

The length of skeleton is 120 cm.

Grave N 12

Grave N 12 is situated between *LMI3-squares*

Grave is situated on the east side of altar, it is damaged grave; there were cleaned fragments of skull and part of leg-bones (tibia and fibula), pelvis is very much damaged, thigh bones are also damaged.

There are stone layer on the north part of the grave.

Grave is without other materials.

The size of Grave:

The length – 150 cm; the width – 55 cm;

Grave N 13

Grave N 13 is situated in *N11-square*.

Skeleton is lied supine, face upward, leveled on the earth; hands on the stomach, head is on the west side position; the bones are preserved badly. There were cleaned fragments of glazed ceramic on the north-west side of grave.

The size of grave:

The length – 115 cm; the width – 57 cm; the depth – 30cm.
The length of skeleton is unclear – it is damaged.

Grave N 14

Grave N 14 is situated in *N9-square* on the field.

The skeleton in the grave is damaged; there are only human finger-bones (left hand) and radial bone; shin bones are damaged; there are partly preserved pelvis-bone and thigh-bone.

The deceased is buried according Christian tradition.

The size of the grave: length – 170 cm; The width – 65 cm; The depth – 25 cm.

b) The second stage.

The Research and Conservation of the Architectural Remains:

The archaeological works held on the remains of the Alaminos St. George church remains in 2017 (29.04 – 12.05) have important results: the walls of the church have been fully exposed, its building technique and chronologically different layers became clear. On the beginning stage of the works we removed two modern niches from the North wall of the church, which have been built at the Southern side by the local population in the end of 70-s or the beginning of 80-s and were intended for the storage of the icons, church oil and candles. On the place of the eastern niche was exposed the original niche of the church (52x65x82cm), in front of which there was arranged a platform created by the pile of soil and polished by the lime mixture. The trapeze-like construction stood on it, built with the grinded stones of the church, the surface of this space was at the same level as the bottom of the niche. A modern bottle was found in the soil, which proved to the theory, that this structure was built by the local population in the 20th century, to enable them to pray by the prothesis niche of the St. George church. Thus, this structure didn't have any historical or artistic value, it was decided to destroy it, after which, South from the Northern wall of the church, by the bottom of the wall, alongside it, was cleaned the fragment of the floor of the altar bema, laid by polished rectangular stones.

The floor of the second building horizon – plastered with lime mixture, exposed under the pilasters in 2016 and the plastered fragment of the same type in the Western part of the Northern wall, where the Western wall begins, are built and dated similar (20th century) to the floor plastered with lime mixture exposed under the prothesis niche. In the course

of the works it was decided to take away these structures, too, after what the step existing alongside the Northern wall was clearly exposed.

The platform, covered by the neatly plastered stones, exposed on the side of the Western wall, in the interior of the church, appeared to be a fragment of the old church floor, and it is on the same level as the same type floor, preserved in the bema.

In the eastern side of the northern wall, after deepening the ground, the north-east corner of the church building was exposed, as well as the apse side of the altar and the beginning of the arc of the apse. The wall of the Southern apse is almost entirely destroyed, only the preparation part of the foundation is preserved.

Therefore, the original planning and architectural forms of the Alaminos St. George church were fully revealed. The church is a hall type building (4.85 m x 8.70 m) and is built just like the other church buildings of the Cyprus island. In fact, it has no foundation. The function of the foundation is performed by the “pillow” of lime mixture, which is lying on the artificially evened clay natural, firm surface. The lime mixture “pillow” follows the Western and Northern perimeter of the church’s walls (The width of the wall is 60 cm.) and from the exterior side, with the remaining width by the bottom of the wall creates a thick, stairs-like (40-50 cm) socle. This type of step wasn’t found by the bottom of the apse.

The church is constructed with the roughly worked on stones of irregular shapes, cracked from rocks, the pile lines are as horizontal as possible; The structure is tidier in the interior than the facades.

The longitudinal walls were divided by the two pairs of pilasters. According to the building traditions and the parallel materials we can assume, that the holding arcs of the main arc was transferred onto them (North to South direction). The pilasters, situated in the East, from the Eastern side are adjoining the large bema, which by width, compared to the congregation space, is a little narrowed, the bema ends with the convex apse of the altar. The apse doesn’t create a full semicircle, i.e. it has a so called “bow” contour, the center of the arc that is conducting it goes beyond the sides of the apse and is situated in the space of the bema. No doubt that nearby the apse in front of the large prothesis niche inside the Northern wall, in the center of the bema the Trapeze should have been standing, the cylinder shaped foot which has been preserved nearby the remains. A thick platform-degree is contouring alongside the wall of the congregation part of the church, this structure isn’t present at the bema or the altar apse.

The Alaminos Church had doors both in the western and the southern walls; these walls are heavily damaged, and therefore the width of the door can not be distinguished, however, the low step that remains on both sides gives us some idea about the door openings' sizes, and the western door should probably have been double.

The works carried out at the initial stage of archaeological research revealed with a great accuracy the fragments of the site, the factuality of which has defined the substance of the church's planning and architectural volume. Keeping in mind these circumstances, in order to better imagine the structure, on the certain parts of the site there appeared a necessity of partial restoration-conservation (of the fragments, preserved at the level of traces). With such an approach, the apse arc and the conjunction of the small sides, the pilasters constructed on the southern wall, the southern and northern corners of the façade and the adjoining line of the socle became clearer.

The layer of the later wall situated in the north, which was added in the last century, was completely removed for the following reasons:

1. The layer was extremely weakened and because of its condition there was a danger of collapse.
2. The late supplement did not have any artistic or historical value;
3. The inner, vertical area almost by 1m. crossed the part of point, on which, with great probability, could be placed the base of the arc cover, and thus, by reconstructing and restoring the original view of the wall there would be created the false architectural space.

In order to create the final configuration and shapes of the walls during the rehabilitation process, the additional layers completely replicate the contour of the old masonry, which prevented the danger of formation of dry geometric and unnatural lines.

In the process of creating the conservation layers it was used the lime mixture, which is a so called "complex" mixture, made with the high strength cement, light thermal filler and high quality lime compounds.

In order to partially restore the authentic view of the Church - in addition to the initially planned only conservational works - the process of research has arisen the need for partial restoration, but only with the minimum interference, according to international standards.

In order to reveal the plan of apses with the stones that were remaining in the interior as result of destruction, two rows of masonry were restored, by which the eastern part of the church was bundled and the building's plan acquired the complete (original) view.

For the same reason the pilasters of the southern and northern walls were partially restored. In particular, the pilasters of the southern wall were restored with the two rows of masonry, while of the northern wall – in a different way: because the north wall was relatively whole (though in a bad condition) and, therefore, the eastern pilaster situated on it have been preserved to 1,6 m, it was strengthened at the whole altitude. While the western pilaster of the same wall has been restored only on the level of two pile lines.

For the purpose of conservation of the southern wall, its whole perimeter was covered with a complex mixture and there was done a partial restoration of the façade masonry.

In total, 35 days have been spent on the excavation, examination and partial restoration of the church.

Burials.

During the works carried out in 2017, the burials were revealed both around the church and in its interior.

The burial № 1-17

Was revealed by northern wall of the church, in the square J 10. It's a pit burial. 60-70 cm depth from the zero level. Represents a child's burial. The bones are poorly preserved.

The body lies with the head to the west, on the back. Straight. The full length of the skeleton cannot be distinguished due to the damage.

The corrugated and sardine beads were revealed in the grave.

The burial № 2 - 17.

Was revealed by northern wall of the church, in the square K 9. Presumably a pit burial. The contours of the burial cannot be distinguished. 60-70 cm depth from the zero level. Represents a child's burial. The body lies with the head to the west, on the back, straight. The skeleton is poorly preserved. The length of the skeleton is 55 cm. The burial doesn't have any inventory.

The burial № 3-17.

The burial was revealed in the square J 10. It was revealed at 90 cm depth from the zero level. It's a pit burial. By the head of the skeleton a stone in places, which must have been a sign of the grave. The skeleton lies with the head to the west, on the back. Straight. The hands are folded on the stomach. The length of the skeleton is 154 cm.

Near the skull, there was found a glazed bowl. The skeleton is holding a slingshot stone in the hand.

The burial № 4-17.

a pit burial covered by a marble stone tile was revealed by the northern wall, in the interior, in the square L 10. The burial is placed next to the northern wall of the church, is situated between two pilasters. The length of the burial tile is 80 cm, the width – 52 cm. It was revealed at 185 cm depth from the zero level. The small size stone debris was found under the stone tile.

The length of the pit is 170cm, the width 56 cm. Two deceased, one buried on the top of the other were revealed in the burial.

At the depth of 20 cm from the grave tile, at the depth of 205 cm from the zero level there was revealed a skeleton, lying with the head to the west, on the back, straight, with hands folded on the stomach. The length of the skeleton is 160 cm.

The skeleton had the grave goods: 1. A bronze circle (ring) was revealed in the area of the hands, presumably it has been worn on the finger.

2. An upturned glazed bow with a heel was lying by the skull, which was covering the skull of the deceased buried below the skeleton.

The second skeleton was cleaned at the depth of 215 cm from the zero level. It was lying with the head to the west, on the back, straight. The length of the skeleton is 152 cm. The fragments of the bowl glazed in greenish-whitish was lying by the femur bone of the left leg. The floor of the burial was revealed at the depth of 42 cm from the basement of the church.

The burial № 5-17.

The burial was revealed within the interior of the church, in the north-west corner, the square L 9. 185 cm depth from the zero level. It's a stone box burial. The length of the burial is 115 cm, the width – 37 cm. Three bodies buried on the top of one another were revealed in the burial.

A coin (bronze) was revealed in the north-west corner of the burial. In the central part of the burials a square, flat brick has slid. The length of the brick is 22 cm, the width – 17 cm., the thickness – 3 cm. the brick is marked on the diagonals (the ornament was made before burning).

At the depth of 198 cm from the zero level there has been revealed a child's skeleton. It is lying with head to west, on the back, straight. The length of the skeleton is 61 cm.

By the skull of the skeleton there were revealed the fragments of the

bowl, glazed in blue, and by the feet - the fragments of the bowl, glazed in greenish whitish.

After removing the first skeleton there was revealed the second body. The skull of this skeleton was placed in the eastern part. Presumably, the skull was moved when the second deceased was buried.

The length of the second skeleton is 92 cm. An iron artifact was revealed by the feet. The fragments of a glazed bowl were lying below the feet.

The third skeleton was revealed below the second, at the depth of 217 cm below the zero level. It is lying with the head in the west, on the back, straight. The length of the skeleton is 90 cm. Fragments of a glazed bowl were revealed in the area of the feet.

The burial № 6-17.

Was revealed south from the apse of the church, 1,3 m apart, in the square M 12. At the depth of 150-160 cm from the zero level. The burial is dug in the yellowish clay layer. Represents a child's burial. The skull hasn't been preserved. The body is lying with the head to the west, on the back, straight. The length of the skeleton is 45 cm.

Fragments of the side-bottom of two bowls were lying by the left hand of the skeleton.

The burial № 7 - 17.

Is situated in the South-East from the apse of the church, 90 cm apart (North from the burial № 6 at distance of 40 cm.) The burial is dug in the yellowish clay layer, at the depth of 160 cm from the zero level. It is a pit burial. Two polished rock stones are inserted near the skull (are restricting the skull). The skeleton is lying with the head to the west, on the back, straight, with hands folded on the stomach. The length of the skeleton is 130 cm. Two fragments of a red fabric bowl were found by the feet of the skeleton.

The burial № 8 - 17.

The burial was revealed east from the church, 80 cm from the apse, the grave was dug in the yellowish-clay layer. It is situated at the depth of 150-155 cm below the zero level. It's a pit burial. A child's skeleton was revealed. The skeleton is lying with the head to the west, on the back, straight. The visible length of the skeleton is 65 cm. (Below the knees the limbs of the skeleton enter the profile, and because of that It couldn't have been fully cleaned).

The fragments of a glazed bowl were found near the skull.

The burials are dated as 15th-16th centuries. Especially important is the fact that within the interior of the church were revealed the burials of the 16th century. It means that in the historic chronicles of exactly this period (the source – Etienne de Lusignann) mentioning a church of Georgians in the surroundings of Alaminos are based upon a real basis. Therefore, with a great probability we can conclude, that the Alaminos St. George church in Cyprus has really represented the main point of Georgians – metochion of the Gialia Monastery.

Sophtades St. George church archaeological excavations

Archaeological excavations on the Cyprus island, in the village Softades was carried out in 2017, within the grant of Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (Code of the Project- HE17 43) and this project will continue for three years. In 2017 excavations were carried out from 10th of October till 4th of November.

On the south part of the island of Cyprus, south-west from the village Kiti (Kίτι, Larnaca district) is a small village/settlement Softades, where is located small hill, 10 meter above sea level (the GPS coordinates of hill are – 36S- 548949.86mE, 3852569.36mN; 36S-548913.49mE, 3852544.01mN; 36S-548888.50mE, 3852574.87m.N), 300 meter from the sea, quite close to the main road. There is remain of semicircular apse of alter, oriented eastern on the top point of a hill. These church remains are connected to the name of Saint George by local folk tradition and Cypriot churchmen. According to these traditions St. George Church was belonged to Georgian Monastery. This basic data is in logical convergence with historic sources, mentioning Georgian monasteries in the area of Alaminos (Etienne de Lusignan., Description of the island of Cyprus, Paris, 1580, on all these data analysis). The hill was completely covered with plants (high grass, thorny bushes) and there were interspersed the fragments of ceramics all over the territory of site.

The first stage excavations

The goal of the first stage (2017 season) excavations was fixing of the perimeter of the Church. According to this, first of all excavation of remains of protuberance apse on the east side of the hill was began. Visible high of apse above the earth level is 87 cm; width of an apse wall – 140 cm; the diameter of the apse – 2, 92 cm. The apse, which was built with several layers of cracked and different size irregular stones, has semicircular shape. There are another remains of some building on the south-east part of the hill, function of which is not yet clear.

Archaeological fieldworks began on the east side of protuberance apse, where was removed 15 cm. thickness of grey color, friable earth level and after this action was able to see mortar sharpened surface. Protuberance apse is circled with this mortar sharpened surface. During the excavation process were discovered clay tiles and fragments of ceramics. There was fixed an unsystematic stone layer and also fragments of stones with mortaring along the north side of the Apse. These stones, as it was clear during the excavation process, were part of north nave's east wall. The length of the wall, for present-day statement, is 51 cm. and width is 57 cm.); near the unsystematic stone layer, in the gray color friable earth, appeared damaged limestone slab, in which is carved equal-armed cross. Both sides of a slab are processed (the size of slab – 22X19X7 cm.) The length of equal-armed cross is 10 cm. and the width is 9 cm. There is a remain of a right-angled aperture on the down side of cross, on the slab.

After removing the grey color, friable earth level from the external perimeter of apse appeared one more down layer of an apse building. This older building layer was built with processed, but not sliced stones. They are connected to each other with mortar. There were appeared the fragments of ceramics and clay tiles after the preparation of external perimeter; some fragments of ceramics are glazed.

During the excavation process of the St. George Church, the south nave was partly cleaned. The south nave is built with cobble-stones; stones are connected to each other with mortar. The length of the south nave's east, which is located in K 14 trench wall is 180 cm. and the width is 70 cm. The length of south nave's west wall, located in the K 13 trench, for present-day statement, is 138 cm. the width is 58 cm.

Near the south nave's south wall in the K 14 trench became visible a limestone slab (the size of a slab – 40X32X7 cm.), on the limestone slab are presented geometric ornaments. There is a circle in the quadrant, which is carved on the surface of a limestone slab. This circle made triangular form ornaments near the corners of quadrant. The flat space between them is filled with three carved lines. Inner side of the circle are two almond-shaped ornaments in parallels. Also between them are carved indirect lines in parallels. At the end of almond-shaped ornaments is carved one horizontal line and it divides the ornament in two parts. From this horizontal line to the south are carved, semicircular lines in parallels.

Next to the above mentioned limestone slab, after 5 cm. in the same K 14 trench was found one more damaged limestone slab (the size of

a slab – 36X27X7 cm.). This is also ornamented with geometric figures. On the right side of the slab are three carved, semicircular form lines, on the left side of them is presented one relief and vertical line; on the left side of this vertical line is also three carved, semicircular form lines; on the most left side of the slab are presented also two carved, semicircular form lines; on the top point of the slab, at the joining point of vertical line, are three semicircular form, carved lines.

There is dug N 1 Trench in H 15 Square for identification the dimensions of the church on the field; during the digging process 30 cm thickness, grey color, friable earth level was taken out from the perimeter; and after it became visible a continuation of the south wall. The wall is, for present-day statement, layer of cobble-stones; at the beginning of a stone layer, in the east part is proved rectangular cavity (50X30 cm.), middle side of which is deepened (some kind of rectangular stone reservoir) and in it are thrown middle size stones after the demolition.

The length of the presented wall is 190 cm. the width is 55 cm. There are proved the marble slabs on the north side of this wall, which are connected to this wall. Four such marble slabs are discovered for the moment.

The sizes of the slabs:

- N 1 slab – length is 41 cm; width is 44 cm;
- N2 slab – length is 55 cm; width is 42 cm;
- N3 slab – length is 34 cm; width is 27 cm;
- N 4 slab – length is 43 cm; width is 39 cm;

There is discovered in this trench a fragment of damaged limestone capital, on which is carved an acanthus ornament. The interior of the wall, on the south part of which an unsystematic stone layer are visible, is plastered with mortar. After the cleaning of this layer, appeared a bronze nail, the fragments of glazed ceramics, and the fragments of a handle of a glass vessel.

The above mentioned marble slabs, discovered in H 15 square, continuing to the north direction of H 14 square and connected to the stone layer, which is near the wall in H 14-13 squares;

The marble slabs, proved in H15 square with large oval form space, are separated out from the marble slabs, which are found in H 14 square, to the south direction of stone layer; this space (195X67 cm.), supposedly, might have belonged to a grave. The Trench N 2 was cut in F 15 Square, which is interfacing of H 15 Square; in the Trench N 2 was cleaned a south outbuilding, continuation of the south wall (174X80 cm.).

The Trench N 4 was dug (in the H 14 – H 13 Squares) for attesting the north wall of the south nave; the part of the north wall (185X57 cm.) is

proved in H 13 Square, 25 cm. down from surface of earth. The interior of the wall (in the north part) is plastered with mortar; after the preparation process of this perimeter are revealed artifacts – clay tile fragments, glazed and non-glazed fragments of ceramics and glass vessel fragments also. There are proved two marble slabs in the interior of the wall. The length of N 1 slab is 102 cm; the width is 31 cm; the slab N 2 is covered, supposedly, with lime; the length of the part, which is cleaned already, is 19 cm; the width is 25 cm.

There is attested a basis of the column in I 13 Square, which is on the east side of H 13 Square. The basis is fixed to the continuation perimeter of the wall. The base was discovered 18 cm. down from the earth modern surface. The inner diameter of a base for column is 48 cm; the out diameter is 60 cm; the base is circled with double plastered mortar. There are stones put on the base of the column, the stones are plastered with mortar later. There is attesting also an unsystematic stone layer on the east side of this basis. On the south part of the wall, in H 14 Square, after preparation process is proved the stone layer, where attesting also the fragments of marble slabs. The interior of indicated wall, on the slabs' side, is plastered with mortar.

The Trench was dug in E 15 Square, which is interfacing of F 15 Square; in this trench is excavated the continuation (227X85 cm.) of the south wall of south nave, 32 cm. down from the earth surface in this square is also proved the south-west corner of the nave. During the preparation process, in the stone layer, is attesting the fragment of ceramic; the fragment is ornamented – on surface is carved two horizontal lines and between lines is also carved wavy ornament. The wall goes to the north direction; the length for present-day situation is 7 meter, the width is 61 cm; there was discovered a bronze bell on the external perimeter of the wall; this wall from upside is plastered with mortar. On the north side of the west wall, supposedly, attesting the door (230X58 cm.), which is fixed 20 cm. down from the earth surface.

For the identification of precise dimensions of the south wall of the south church nave the trenches were dug in J 15 and in I 15 Squares; in these trenches was appeared the south wall. There is proved an unsystematic stones layer to the south direction of the wall in J 15 Square; the wall in this square is appeared 27 cm. down from the earth surface. This wall has a continuation in I 15 Square also, where after removing homogenous, grey color friable earth level appeared vertical position standing on the stone. The interior of the stone is plastered with mortar

and this area might be an aperture of the doorway; the length of it – 110 cm; from above mentioned vertical standing stone to the north direction 3 cm; is proved a damaged limestone slab (41X38X5 cm.), which is decorated also. The slab has a rectangular form, after the preparation came to light two chevrons and between them is triangular form ornament, triangular is up with one angle; to the west direction 18 cm from this slab is proved another fragment of damaged decorated limestone slab (26X19X6 cm.); on the slab is visible three carved horizontal lines, in the center of it are also more three carved lines; on the right, up corner of the slab is visible a semicircular form carved cube; 39 cm. to the west direction from the second slab is proved one more damaged fragment of decorated limestone slab (39X30X5 cm.); on the slab is pictured two inter backward triangular, they are separated to each other with three carved indirect lines. To the north direction of indicated decors, in I 14 Square became visible many damaged fragments of clay tiles; there is proved also very corroding fragment of iron nail in this square.

The length of the south wall of the church south nave is 18 meter; the length of the west wall is 7 meter for the present-day situation.

The fieldwork was began in K9 Square; purpose of this work was to indicate the walls on the territory of north nave of church; there is appeared the north-east corner of nave. The length of remaining north wall is 190 cm; width is 59 cm. The length of the east wall is 166 cm; the width is 60 cm. The interior of above mentioned north-east corner is plastered with mortar. The north wall is fixed 20 cm. down from the earth surface; the east wall is fixed 48 cm. down from the earth surface. 63 cm thickness of grey-brownish friable earth level was removed in K 9 Square. After it appeared many fragments of tiles, glazed ceramics' fragments and a fragment of decorated slab, on it is carved three vertical lines. In the interior of this wall is proved two big sized stones; these stones, supposedly, indicate the flooring level. In the K 10 Square (which interfacing to K 9 Square) is proved a fragment of marble iconostasis.

The testing trench N 3 (3X3 m.) was dug 12, 3 meter from F 15 Square, for identification of the north wall; in the north corner of this trench appeared the remains of wall (1,13X50 cm.) 30 cm. down from the earth surface. The wall layer leans on the north wall from east side; the length of this wall layer for present-day situation is 65 cm. After the preparation process became visible also west wall, the length is 258 cm. the width is 50 cm. During preparation process is this trench also appeared tile fragments and ceramics.

Stratigraphy of the Mound

There were made three stratigraphic trenches on the perimeter of the mound:

N 1 stratigraphic trench (dimensions – 3X2 m.) is situated to the north direction 6 meter far from the N 3 testing trench. 22 cm. from the earth surface is proved brownish humus layer, down of it layer is yellowish sand and clay layer, thickness – 36 cm. down of yellowish sand and clay layer is appeared soil layer, thickness – 60 cm. down of soil layer was cleaned again sand and clay layer, which is sterile; thickness – 54 cm. The depth of this trench is 190 cm.

N 2 stratigraphic trench (dimensions – 2X1 m.) is situated to the north direction from the apse; first of all was removed humus layer, thickness – 25 cm. down of humus is appeared 85 cm. thickness sand and clay stony layer. The depth of trench is 110 cm. in this trench after the preparation process is proved Roman period ceramic materials and also a fragment of amphora.

N 3 stratigraphic trench (dimensions – 2X1 m.) is situated to the north direction of the trench N 2 (see also ab.) first of all was removed 20 cm thickness humus layer. The depth of the trench N 3 is 75 cm. after removing humus is appeared sand and clay stony layer, thickness – 55 cm. in the south-west corner and in the north-west corner became visible two pits; their function is still unclear. The diameter of N 1 pit is 16 cm. and of N 2 pit is 30 cm. After the preparation process of this trench N 3 appeared ceramic materials.

Brief Art Studies Conclusion

75 cm. height remains of church altar apse is visible up to the earth level, it is situated on the very east point of the Softades hill; after research process is clear, that the west-east axis of the building is bend 35° to the north direction, and this point is marking the orientation of the whole church.

The inner side of the semicircular, protuberance apse (the width of the wall is 120 cm.) is built with small-sized stone layers and the apse has not exactly semicircular form, but a bit oval.

If we concentrate our attention on the thickness of the apse, there are quite clear visible two reconstruction steps; the earlier apse of the church (the width of wall is 120 cm.); the interior of it was plastered with mortar and had exact semicircular form. On the north and south side is appeared about 30 cm. length of shoulders and to the west direction the shoulders

have the walls (the width of the walls is 50 cm.) this is a central nave of the church.

The south wall, which is remained on the plan level, was excavated also. During excavation process became visible also lateral (north and south directions from the apse) nave's east walls, length – 320 cm. It is proof, that the church was three-nave basilica. The whole south wall of the south nave, also the south-west corner of building and half of the west wall are visible now, also marked the outline of the aperture doorway.

So, the size of church is 17, 65X12, 60 meter (PL. XXII).

The church walls, which are remained on the plan level are built with broken stones and mortar. The linear walls' short width is 50 cm. we are of the opinion, that this short width was reason, that is was covered with tree trunk roof. This type of roof was wide speared in early Cypriot architecture. In the H 15 and I 13 Squares is fixed so called "Cypriot marble" floor. This is the area of the south wall of south nave and also to the north direction of south wall of central nave.

In I 13 Square, on the south wall of the central nave appeared in situ circled-plan building, which is built with broken stones and mortar. This structure is basic space of column dividing the naves (d. – 60 cm.). From the north side this structure is marked by two steps which are 28 cm. up from the church floor level. These steps might be the parts of altar apse solely which is pulled out west part. This detail is also characteristic of the medieval basilica (PL. XXIII).

In the south nave of church, on two location were concentrated the fragments mild limestone slabs; the slabs are decorated on one side (PL. VII). The Style of décor is homogenous and is presented geometric figures; the slabs, on the east side of nave have the same decorations. The decors might be symmetrically assigned and consisted of: segmental shafts, almond-shaped forms and profiteering; in the central part of the nave the decoration of fragments consist of: shafts, demarcated triangular and rectangular. One fragment is decorated with stylized plant ornament. The slabs are local made, and supposedly, were the partb of iconostasis. In our opinion, that the center of the slabs' composition is (as it is already presented in Cypriot church architecture) equal-armed cross⁷.

The apse of the church altar is dug and damaged by robbers later (PL. XXIV) the floor is also damaged and stones of the different size are

⁷ See – *Stone chancel screen from marathovouno*, in article: Doria Nicolaou, *Liturgical furnishes from early Christian Basilicas of Cyprus (4th – 7th centuries)*: Cahiere du Centre d'Etudes Chypriotes 43, Paris, pp. 156-174.

unsystematically laid in area. During the preparation process of the apse perimeter are proved cone form slabs' 4 fragments (the thickness of fragments are in size 3, 5 – 4 cm.) the edges of two fragments are profiled with rib and concave surface, supposedly it is part of Trapeza (table-form Trapeza) dated to 6th century.

The limestone slab fragment is proved in the north area of the altar apse (size of slab: 22X12X7 cm.), it is decorated with ornament, equal-armed cross, circle, rectangular. The same technology is used also in other Cypriot architectural details, such as early medieval period finely worked slabs. Supposedly, indicated slab was part of a small window. The iconostasis slab fragment might be small size ring, which consisted of three shafts (the size: 11X5X6cm.)⁸

On the south aisle area of the apse (in square H 15) is proved a fragment (size 19X17X11 cm.) of capital or impost or maybe conch of the apse. The ornament has a shape of acanthus leaf and is dated to early medieval period.

For the present-day situation several building levels are presented on the Softades Church:

1. Three nave Basilica dated back to the early medieval period, semi-circular, protuberance apse. Tree-trunk and clay tile roof (6th century), the diameter of semicircular apse is 456 cm.

2. For the next period the building level was added, the altar apse has the same form (diameter – 268 cm.) the walls of nave are bigger and the church nave is a bit smaller than it was in older church. We think that building was covered with arch and it was one nave building.

3. in altar nave is proved also third building period (diameter of altar apse – 202 cm.) the apse has oval form, the church also in this time might be one nave building.

There are presented glazed ceramics, dated to 12th-13th centuries, painted plaster fragments, supposedly, are connected to the second or third building period of the church.

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⁸ The same slabs is possible to see in Limasos Medieval Museum; see also Alexandre *Bourier*, *la basilique Horsles-Murs* ("at Meydan"): Cahiere du centre d'Etudes Chypristes 43, Paris 2013, p. 69.

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Local population of Alaminos.

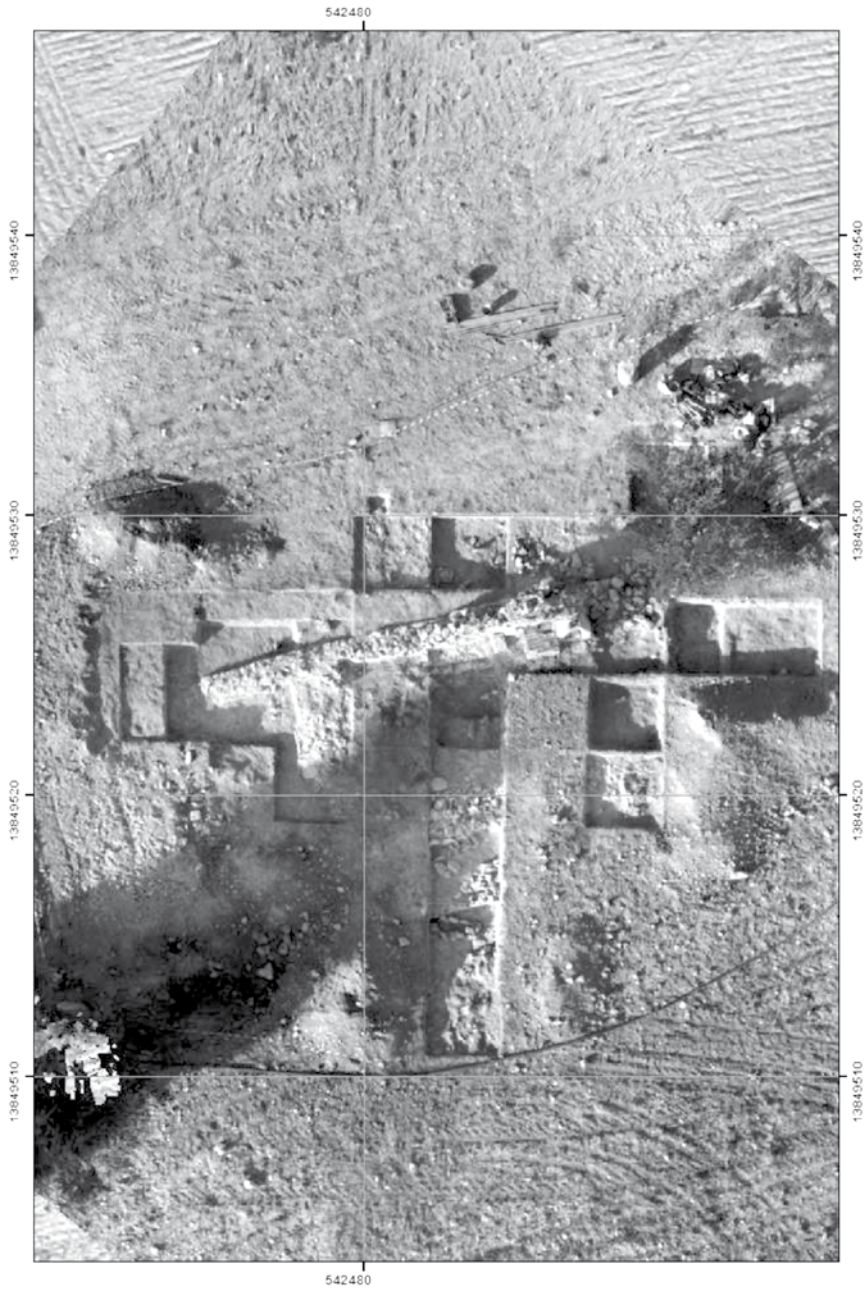
All drawings were made by architect Mr. Merab Kasradze.



Location of vill. Alaminos and Softades



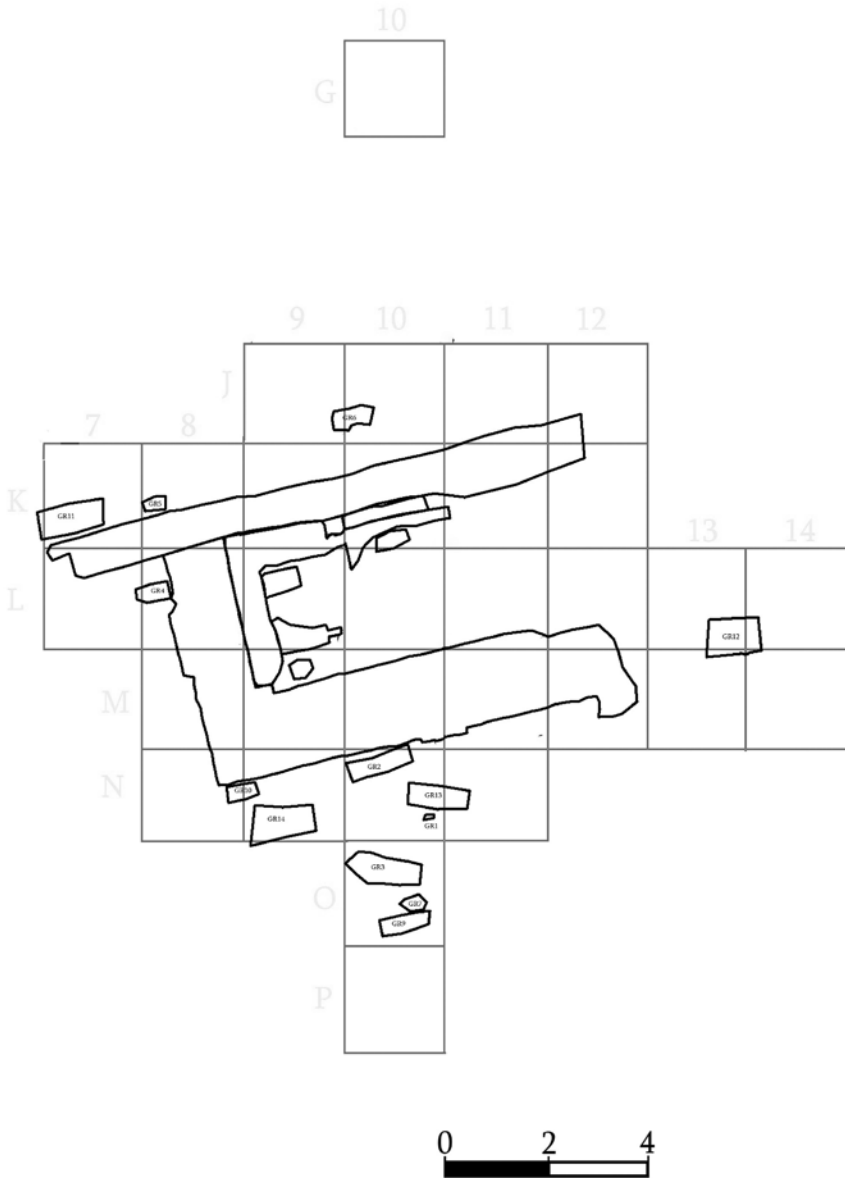
St. George church's ruins



Location of St. George church with GPS coordinates



Stages of excavations of Alaminos' church



Grade system of excavated area



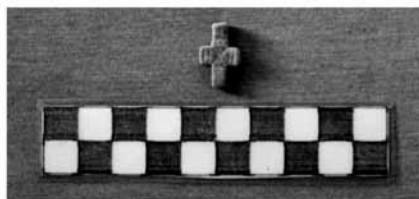
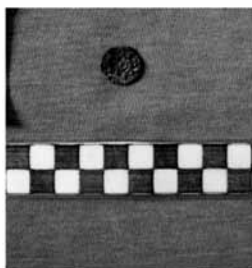
The Northern wall



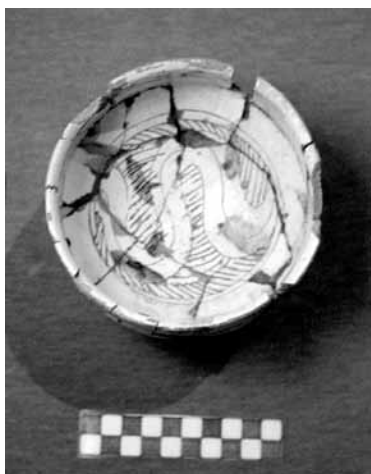
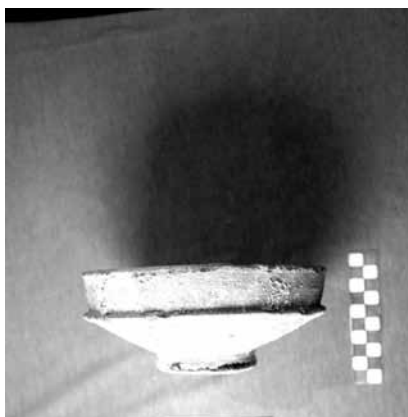
Excavations of Alaminos' church



Alaminos, graves N 3 and N 8



Copper coin and Steatite cross from the graves



Cups from the graves



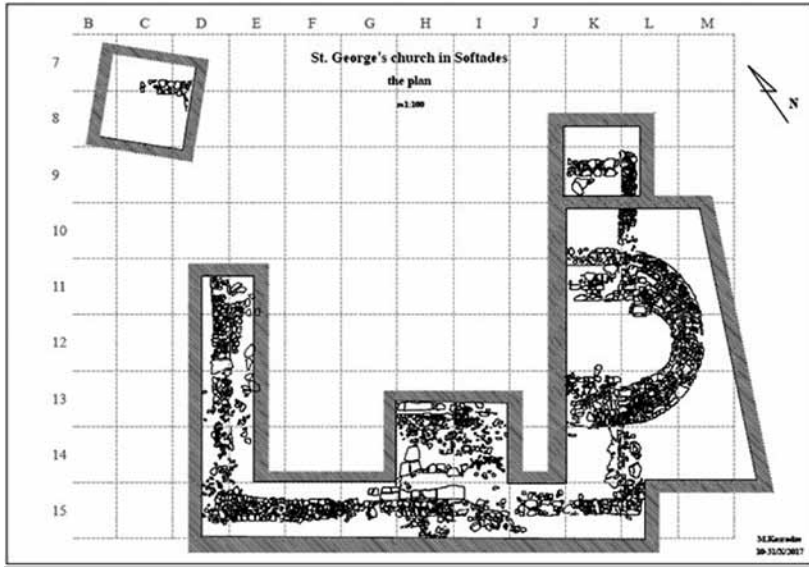
The partial restoration of the Northern wall and the pilasters of Alaminos church



The restored church in Alaminos



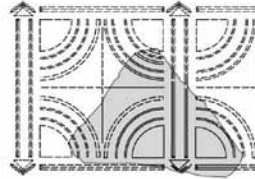
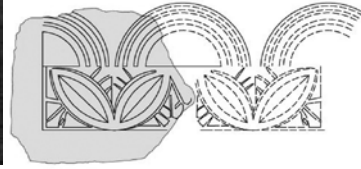
Location of Softades church



Plan of the Softades church (2017 excavations)



Apse of Softades church



Limestone slabs with geometric ornaments found in the K14 Trench

Georgian Churches in Larnaka District (Alaminos/Sophtades area, Cyprus)

On the southern part of the island of Cyprus, near the villages Alaminos and Softades, there are located St. George Churches. Based on the literary and folk traditions, they were identified as Georgian churches of 13th-16th.