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History and Historicism in 'British' Cyprus and 'French' Tunisia: A Comparative Study of Colonial Architecture Across the Mediterranean

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British and French colonial administrations exploited various aspects of the histories of Cyprus and Tunisia to justify their occupation of those countries during the late 19th and 20th centuries. There, archaeologists unearthed Greek, Roman, Christian, and medieval artifacts that testified to the Mediterranean's rich, complex history and the various cultural networks that have bound it together. As the same time, designers created complementary historicist architectures that facilitated self-aggrandizing presentations suggesting that the European colonial presence was both historically precedented and superior. Architecturally, such claims can be seen in many of the government buildings, Christian churches, and antiquities museums built by colonizers in each context. This article presents an account of these colonial-era built environments constructed in Cyprus and Tunisia by Britain and France (1878–1960 and 1881–1956, respectively) through several conceptions of the Mediterranean cultivated by colonizers, including Ancient Greek and Roman, early Christian, and medieval Crusader lenses. It does this through an underutilized comparative thematic method that crosses the boundaries of European empires and is thus an approach with potential for application to other colonial situations. Ultimately, the article invites the development of additional comparative projects that span empires, geographies, and themes, in order to facilitate an understanding of salient colonial-era built environments and global architectural histories that transcend national borders and colonialist rhetoric.

Keywords: colonialism; empire; archaeology; antiquity; Christianity; Mediterranean Sea

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Comparing Histories and Comparative Historiography

In many ways retrospective in their outlooks, modern European colonizers frequently turned to the past to legitimate their present acts and imperial ambitions, and both British and French colonial governments strategically exploited distant history to justify their occupation of Cyprus and Tunisia, respectively, during the 19th and 20th centuries. Officials and architects invoked multiple Mediterraneans in both contexts. They activated particular aspects of the past through contemporary historicist architecture, thereby rendering these self-aggrandizing histories present. Such efforts can be seen in the design of antiquities museums, government buildings, and Christian churches that showcased an alleged correspondence between past and present empires and ideologies in both colonial contexts. Responding to Jean-Louis Cohen's still-relevant observation that comparative studies of European empires remain rare and present opportunities for robust inquiry (2006: 350),[1] this article illuminates one area — heritage appropriation and mythmaking through built environments — that was exploited by two major global empires at the edges of the Mediterranean Sea, itself 'an imagined, constructed space' complexly bound to the British establishment of several military outposts there during the first decades of the 19th century and the French conquest of Algeria (Clancy-Smith 2011: 10; Blais and Deprest 2012; Murray-Miller 2017) (**Figure 1**). Indeed, Cyprus

Figure 1: The colonized Mediterranean, 1912. French occupied territories are shaded purple and British occupied territories are pink. JG Bartholomew, *Map of the Countries Bordering the Mediterranean Sea*, for *National Geographic*, January. Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library. https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:4m90fp53q.

sat within what many in the United Kingdom saw as a 'British lake' controlled from their bases in Gibraltar, Malta, the Ionian Islands, and eventually Egypt, while Tunisia helped enclose a Mediterranean conceived as a 'French lake', thereby evoking the idea of the ancient Roman 'Mare Nostrum' (Holland 2012: 26–67; Blais and Deprest 2012).[2] Building on the substantial scholarship of critical heritage studies that recognizes the constructed nature of cultural identities and frequent animation of the past for present purposes,[3] the article takes Manuel Borutta and Sakis Gekas's conception of the 'Colonial Sea' — 'a maritime space of colonial interactions and entanglements that transcend continental and national boundaries' — as a starting point in its critique of colonial architectural historiography's persistently fragmented nature (2012: 2).

Cyprus and Tunisia make an appropriate pair for a comparative study, as they were each considered by European powers to have been foundational contributors to Western civilization — via ancient Greek and/or Roman and early Christian cultures — that had declined substantially under Islamic rule and were thus in need of 'improvement' in order to substantiate modern Western dominance. Colonizers thus compared their time to a distant past that they idealized and sought to both emulate and surpass in countries that were simultaneously familiar and foreign.[4] Once occupied, Cyprus and Tunisia were relatively peripheral colonies that offered limited strategic advantages to their respective European metropoles. In these countries, two competing modern empires excavated, interpreted, built, and imagined within similar contexts and achieved similar architectural outcomes. Taken together, the pair allows one to cross the national and geographic boundaries that have limited our understanding of colonialism and the Mediterranean. This trans-imperial study of Cyprus and Tunisia ultimately illustrates critical shared histories and the Mediterranean's malleability as a tool for colonial domination.

In exploring colonialist architectures of Cyprus and Tunisia, this article adopts a comparative case study approach based on visual and textual analysis derived from both archival and site research. It makes use of primary sources (including archived architectural plans, correspondence, and historical imagery and published impressions), and brings together secondary source literature by architectural and urban historians who have worked on some aspects of this material in a more traditional, isolated fashion. Following brief introductions to the colonial situations of Cyprus and Tunisia, the article addresses the role played by archaeology in colonial occupation. It then presents three different thematic interpretations of the Mediterranean context developed by colonial powers through modern architectures in each country, including ancient Greek and Roman, early Christian, and medieval Crusader Mediterraneans, and the buildings that represented them. In both Nicosia and greater Tunis, government buildings, antiquities museums, and Christian

churches are presented as illustrative examples. While no single text can capture the full complexity of British and French colonialism and the architecture that developed over nearly a century, this article reveals several similar manifestations of colonialist historicism and mythmaking within different imperial contexts. Comparative, but not comprehensive, it invites the development of additional projects that span empires, geographies, and themes to facilitate a deeper understanding of salient global architectural histories that transcend borders and colonialist rhetoric. Much of this colonial-era architecture remains extant, having been inherited by postcolonial generations in Cyprus and Tunisia, further strengthening the need for appreciating the complex past of these built environments.

Occupying Cyprus and Tunisia

Both Cyprus and Tunisia had been part of the Ottoman Empire in the centuries leading up to their occupation by European powers and their incorporation into the British and French Empires (in 1878 and 1881).[5] Before that, however, each had experienced successive occupations and administration by external powers, including Roman, various Western European, and Islamic empires. In many ways each functioned as a true crossroads. The cultural histories of each territory was thus, and remains, richly complex, and both British and French conceptions of Cyprus and Tunisia during the 19th century were founded, in large part, on limited understandings of these pasts stemming from basic ignorance to Orientalism and racism. European interests in both places were inspired by religious references, ancient texts, Romantic literature, and contemporary travel accounts. British people's conceptions of Cyprus at the time were based on a few Biblical references to the island (which was the home of Saint Barnabas) and several ancient accounts of its history, including those of Pliny, Strabo, and Herodotus (Edbury 2001: 14–15; Kiely and Ulbrich 2012: 308–10). Similarly incomplete, French notions of North Africa during the mid-19th century were largely informed by popular classical texts on the region's Roman history (by Polybius, Plutarch, Livy, Virgil, et al.) and the activities of early Christian saints (particularly Saints Augustin, Tertullian, and Cyprian). The incursions of British and French kings (Richard I [*r.*1189–99] and Louis IX [*r.*1226–70]) during the Crusades provided particularly compelling episodes for European audiences as well, inspiring medievalist mythologizing of both countries (Edbury 2001: 14; Varnava 2009: 45–48; Coslett 2023: 423–24). Romantic literature by François-René Chateaubriand and Gustave Flaubert invoked many of these histories, painting a picture of a Tunisia deeply embedded in antiquity, and of a dormant Carthage ripe for rediscovery (Chateaubriand 2006; Green 1982). Cyprus too was seen as a place worthy of increased study and excavation, even if early visitors departed 'with confused impressions that accorded little with their expectations' (Kiely and Ulbrich 2012: 310).

With regard to modern identities, both Cyprus and Tunisia were typically understood with respect to contemporary politics and other countries. In the case of the former, the majority Greek-speaking Orthodox Christian Cyprus was 'always surrounded by externalities, uncertainties, and ambiguities' (Holland and Markides 2006: 162). The island was recognized vis à vis Greece and its early-19th-century struggles for liberation from the Ottoman Empire (of which both were part), a counter to Ottoman power, its potential as a *place d'armes* for British opposition to Russian expansion, a link to British India (via the Euphrates River), and after WWI in relation to British possessions in the Middle East (Varnava 2009: 1; Edbury 2001: 14–20, Holland and Markides 2006: 162–88, 178–79).[6] Tunisia, whose leaders were technically subservient to the Sublime Porte but enjoyed relative independence, was strategically relevant to France as a buffer to neighboring Algeria, the conquest of which France had begun in 1830. The description of Cyprus as a 'pawn' in European imperial machinations applies to Tunisia as well, as the occupation of both countries provided land for military bases, access to natural resources and commercial markets, and some degree of nationalist legitimacy in competitive empire building (Edbury 2001: 16; Varnava 2009: 246–71; Perkins 2014: 15–43). Similarities aside, it should be said that Tunisia was substantially colonized by French and Italian citizens and functioned as a productive, if secondary, French colony, whereas Cyprus was far less populated by Britons and remained far more 'inconsequential' — its 'strategic, political and economic importance was always more imagined than real and was enmeshed within widely held cultural signifiers and myths' — in the far eastern Mediterranean, failing to achieve its intended military import until after World War II (Varnava 2009: 3). Both countries, however, received significant attention from scholars and archaeologists throughout their colonial periods, as their pasts proved irresistible, fortified in part by changing administrative circumstances.

Imperialist Archaeology

Drawn by literature, art, and Christian piety, Europeans traveled to Cyprus and Tunisia in pursuit of not only military posts and economic opportunities, but also the present past. Though neither destination was a standard stop on the Grand Tour itinerary, some came to see and experience, and to unearth physical remains as novices, savants, and eventually as trained archaeologists. Excavation and inspiration operated in a cyclical manner. As succinctly stated by Nabila Oulebsir, 'antiquity can be apprehended through the presence of ruins, tangible traces of the past into the present, which reactivate the memory and make sense. … However, it is always the present that queries the past' (2011: 361). This point — that archaeology reveals as much about history as it does about the situation in which it is practiced — has been explored by

many scholars who have foregrounded its link to European colonialism. Indeed, both developed concurrently and in the same places, and were mutually dependent. As the discipline became increasingly scientific and professionalized, its products — academic discourse, material artifacts, ruins, and museums — became complicit in European imperialism. Excavations were generally dominated by European individuals and institutions and served European interests, both intellectual and political.

The critical role played by archaeology in sustaining colonial power dynamics — as an 'instrument of colonialist policy' — has been addressed by scholars in various geopolitical contexts (Dyson 2006: 174). With regard to the southern Mediterranean shore, archaeologists David Mattingly and R. Bruce Hitchner further acknowledge that 'the historiography of Roman Africa is indelibly linked to the history of modern colonial occupation of the region' through its use in justifying the presence of Europeans as superior intellects and managers of 'civilizing' administration (1995: 166). Indeed, Mattingly describes a 'double process of cultural annexation and alienation' that elevated colonialists as masters and guardians of knowledge based on their scholarly expertise and supposed affiliation with ancient empires while marginalizing indigenous audiences who might have otherwise laid claim to that heritage (1996: 52; Mattingly 2024: 759; Anderson 2006: 181). Within the British colonial context, Richard Hingley explores ways in which archaeology was used to 'justify and support the superiority of England and the West' through its thorough integration within British imperial discourse and Romanization studies (2000: 164). Imagery of the Roman Empire, he notes, was regularly deployed by 19th- and early 20th-century British 'administrators, politicians and academics ... to help them to define the identity and imperial destiny of Britain' (Hingley 2000: 1).

Modern archaeological research in Cyprus was dominated by British figures compelled by the island's complex heritage, although major contributions were made by German, Swedish, and American excavators, among others (**Figure 2**). Thomas Kiely and Anja Ulbrich have explored the appeal of Cyprus's ancient Greek history and the degree to which it reflected the Hellenism that was prevalent among British scholars during the later 19th century. Originally undertaken by educated amateurs, excavations revealed a wealth of information regarding the country's ancient (i.e., Phoenician, Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek and Roman) and medieval (i.e., Byzantine and Crusader-era) history. Though initially done without much financial and logistical support from the British administration, excavations were in time funded by British institutions and unearthed artifacts filled the vitrines of the British Museum and universities across the United Kingdom, as well as those of Nicosia's Cyprus Museum. Though material from the island rarely attained the notoriety of items sent from Greece, it did constitute substantial collections in some cases and reflected 'the intensity of British involvement

in Cypriot archaeology', despite the prohibition of artifact exports from 1905 to 1927 (Kiely and Ulbrich 2012: 305; Kiely 2017). Hardly exempt from the effects of colonialism, archaeology here was also used to elevate the allegedly indigenous Iron Age origin of Cypriot culture — through the invention of the Eteocypriot people — in an effort to undermine the Greek nationalism that constantly challenged British rule (Given 1998). The archaeology of Roman Cyprus has been relatively underappreciated due to longstanding 'colonialist philological notions of Roman domination over a backwater whose people produced a merely imitative imperial culture' (Gordon 2024: 633).

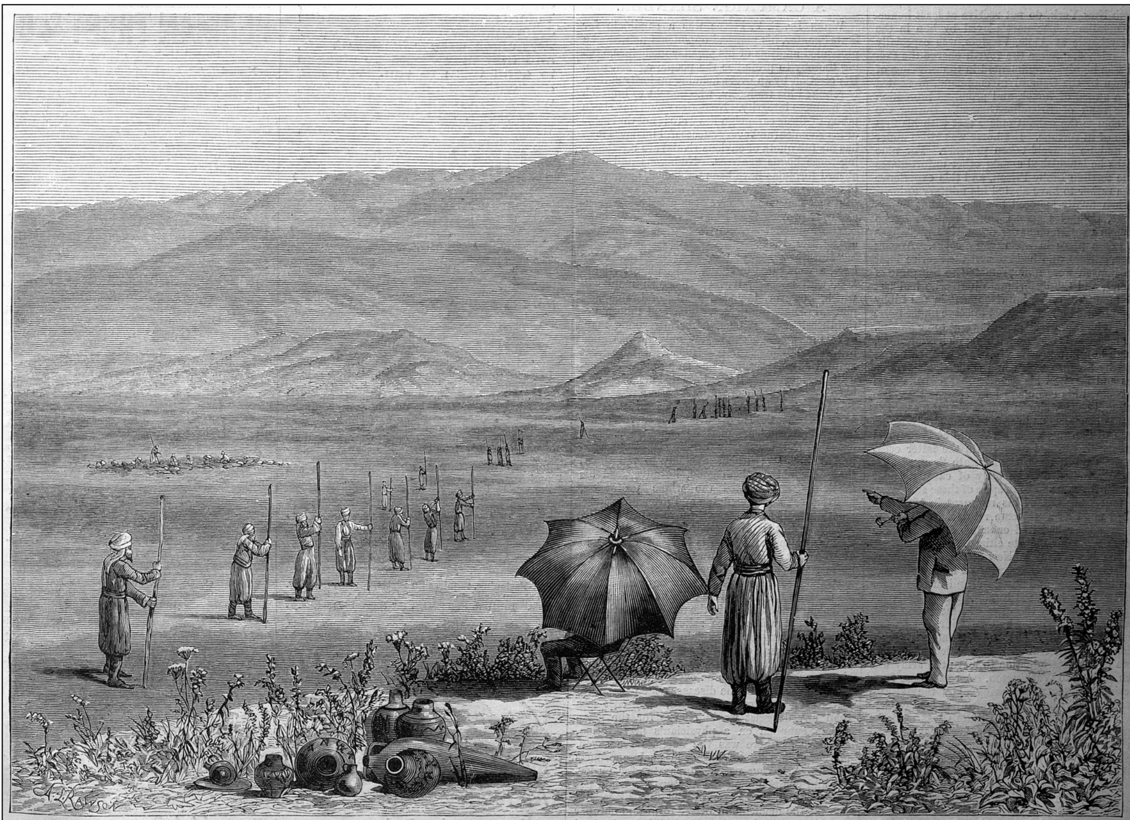

Figure 2: Excavations by Luigi Palma di Cesnola in Cyprus (1877). From Rawson (1877: 1033).

Early excavations in North Africa had first been undertaken by Napoleon III's army in Algeria and by Roman Catholic missionaries there during the mid-19th century, but in time systematic excavation became the policy of French colonial administrations across the region. As laws were promulgated to protect and control excavations, savants joined the ranks of scholars, priests, and soldiers in the field (Dyson 2006: 60–64; Effros 2018) (**Figure 3**). Archaeology in colonial-era Tunisia was a cosmopolitan field, as it was then in Cyprus. Indeed, French archaeologists were joined in Tunisia by Italian, British, and German practitioners, for whom archaeology was 'a

field of confrontation across which different nations were diplomatically advancing their pawns' (Bacha 2013: 69). Clémentine Gutron has documented the broad history of excavation in Tunisia, including the self-serving 'archaeological colonization' of the country under French occupation (2006: 24). Pre-colonial excavation was dominated by Roman Catholic priests in and around Carthage, although some Tunisians were also participating at the time, but with the establishment of the protectorate in 1881, the French administration empowered state-supported excavators around the country (Gutron 2006: 24–39; Bacha 2013; Chaouali 2017; Moumni 2020; Moumni 2022). French interests included Carthaginian (or Punic), Roman, early Christian, and Byzantine antiquities, but Catholic clerics were particularly drawn to North Africa's Christian history (both ancient and medieval). Much to the delight of Europeans, Tunisia's Roman heritage has remained inescapable across the country's landscape, given the importance of the agriculturally rich territory within the Roman Empire and the impressive state of its monumental ruins. Sculpture and mosaics are among the most prevalent artifacts, many of which are found in both the Bardo and Carthage museums in Tunisia, as well as in Paris's Louvre (Bacha 2013: 103–111; Coslett 2023: 426–31).

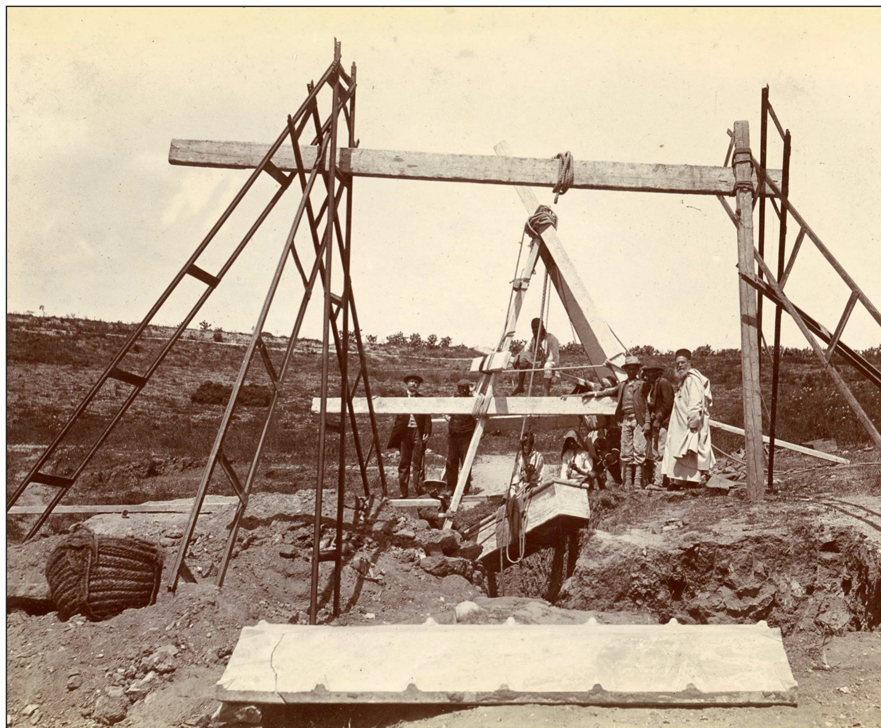

Figure 3: The excavation of a Punic sarcophagus under the supervision of Alfred Louis Delattre near Carthage, ca. 1905. From the album 'Opgravingen door de Witte Paters gedaan in Carthago 1880–1920 (Excavations Done by the White Fathers in Carthage 1880–1920)', Rome, General Archives, Missionaries of Africa (GAMAfr.) via JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.25051046.

Multiple Mediterraneans in Modern Built Environments

The colonial-era built environments of Cyprus and Tunisia reflect European interests and ensured that exposure to the past was not confined to academic journals, isolated ruins, and dusty vitrines. In considering the historicist manifestations of these colonialist archaeological activities and associated perspectives, one may identify a series of lenses through which different histories were prioritized. Indeed, unearthed antiquities informed modern built environments designed to highlight specific Mediterranean imagery and identities, many of which suited British and French imperial ambitions.

Ancient Greek and Roman Mediterranean

Both Cyprus and Tunisia were part of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The nature of Cyprus's relationship with other ancient Greek cultures has been a topic of considerable debate, particularly among British colonialists who strove to present Cyprus as distinct from modern Greece and thus immune to contemporary unification pressures (Given 1998). Though not directly colonized by ancient Greeks, Tunisia had been the capital of the Carthaginian or Punic empire (perennial adversary of Rome and a point of particular pride in postcolonial Tunisia), and engaged competitively with Greeks in southern Italy and Sicily. The subsequent rule of the Romans in Cyprus and in Tunisia (the ancient Roman province of Africa Proconsularis) left the most prominent ruins one finds in each country. Greece and Rome loomed large in the colonialist mind and featured prominently in British and French rhetoric, as has been explored by a growing number of scholars (Biddlestone 2020; Edwards 1999; Hingley 2000; Klaniczay, Werner, and Gecser 2011; Lorcin 2002; Majeed 1999; Mattingly 2024; Oulebsir 2011). Cyprus is, after all, the legendary birthplace of Aphrodite, and Tunisia the site of Carthage and home of Hannibal. As such, these places served as history-saturated geographies that through excavation and extant ruins functioned as touchstones for modern empires. Whether guardians of Western Civilization's 'cradle' or the 'Roman Empire reborn', European colonizers seeking precedents exploited these artifacts, but also built structures that manifested this perspective in self-aggrandizing historicism.

Architecturally, British authorities in Cyprus generally sought to avoid direct association with both the Greek-speaking Christian majority, members of which built notable Greek Revival style schools that served as important cultural centers for the community (Given 1997; Given 2005: 210), and the Turkish-speaking Muslim minority on the island. Though British-built architecture generally adopted the 'Bungalow' style developed in South Asia and Victorian aesthetics popular in Great Britain at the

time (including Elizabethan and Palladian revivals, as well as Arts and Crafts styles) the Cyprus Museum remains a rare exception to the rule (Georghiou 2013: 35–41).[7] Accepting Benedict Anderson's notion that the museum — along with the modern census and map — is a 'profoundly political' colonial 'institution of power', the subtext of such a choice is noteworthy (2006: 178 and 163). Unabashedly Greek Revival, the museum as built in Nicosia was the product of a design process through which British administrators expressed an historicist affiliation with ancient Greek culture as the font of European civilization.

The incorporation of Cyprus into the British Empire in 1878 — at the time 'the only part of the classical Greek world under direct British control' — brought with it increased enthusiasm for organized excavations on the island (Kiely and Ulbrich 2012: 332; Varnava 2009: 56–57). Early calls for a museum in the capital recognized an 'intelligent interest in these relics of a grand past' on the part of locals and their potential as tourist attractions ('Cyprus' 1881). Finds from private fieldwork, and then work done by European academic institutions, were moved from government offices into an ultimately 'inadequate' house on Victoria Street in 1889 (Merrillees 2005: 22). The death of Queen Victoria in 1901, however, inspired renewed interest in a purpose-built facility that might also serve as a memorial to the late queen-empress. A design competition was launched in 1906, prompted by the requirement for the construction of a 'principal' repository in the 1905 Antiquities Law. Of the three submissions received, that of the Greek architect Nicolaos Balanos was selected. Like the others, he opted for the Greek Revival style. As a member of the Athens Archaeological Society, an architect, and a (controversial) restorer of the Acropolis monuments, he was quite familiar with Greek architectural models. George Jeffery, the museum's Curator of Ancient Monuments, worked with Balanos and copied the tetrastyle Ionic temple of Athena Nike from the Acropolis for the museum's façade. The white Pentellic marble of his entrance portico, which had been quarried and sculpted in Greece before being shipped to Famagusta, gleamed against the popular honey gold sandstone used for the building's exterior (**Figure 4**). Balanos's museum, which opened in 1909, became the core of a museum that was expanded several times through 1919 under Jeffery's direction, and then again during the early 1930s and 1959–61 (Georghiou 2013: 104–112; Pilides 2009: 63–72) (**Figure 5**). The museum became an encyclopedic one, its long, timber-roofed galleries filled with statuary, pottery, and other ancient wares cataloging the island's Neolithic through Byzantine history (Dikaios 1961) (**Figure 6**).

Figure 4: The Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, by Nicolaos Balanos and George Jeffery, 1909. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019.

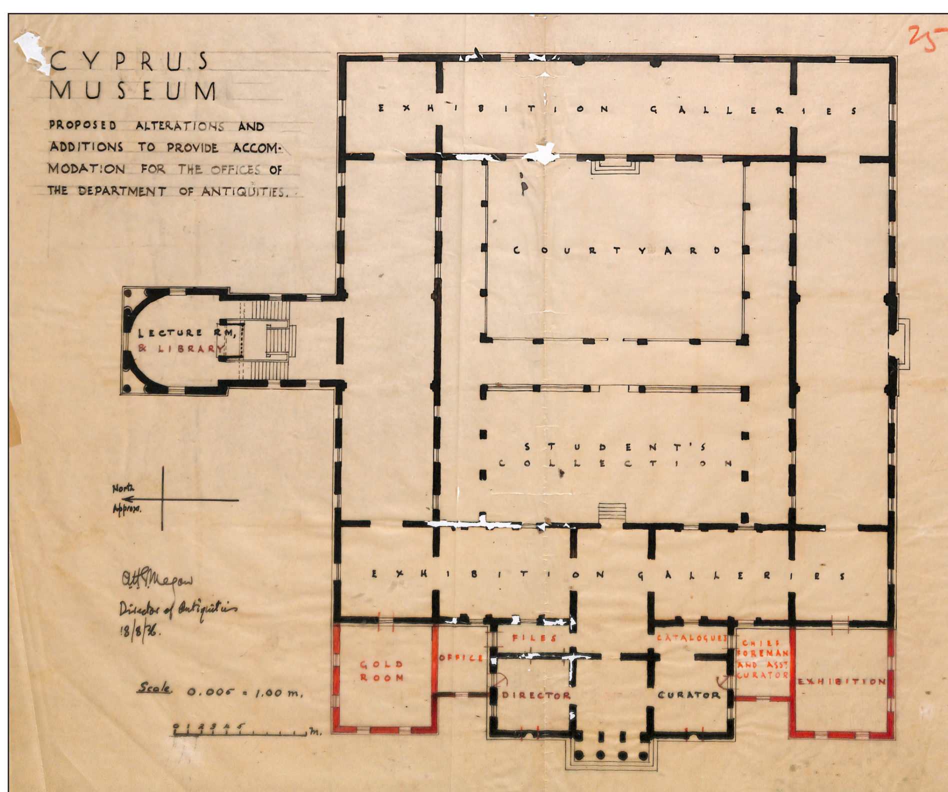

Figure 5: The Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, as it stood in 1936, with proposed alterations framing the original section in red. 'Cyprus Museum: Proposed Alterations. … Plan', 18 August 1936. Nicosia, Cyprus State Archives, SA1/631/1923.

Figure 6: The south long gallery of the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, photographed ca. 1937. Nicosia, Cyprus State Archives, SA1/1026/34.

Fundraising documents for the museum — which had been initially called the Victoria Museum — had solicited donations in 'appeal to the patriotism of the people, without distinction of nationality or creed', with the hope that it would become a 'worthy home for a collection of the relics of the ancient civilization of the Island' ('Memorial' 1901). A plaque mounted above the museum's main entry explained that the building was dedicated in honor of the idolized Victoria, making clear the colonial nature of the building and its foundation (**Figure 7**). In his diary from 1905, Jeffery surmised that loyalty to the queen had been the primary motivation for English donors, and that Cypriots (presumably of the Greek community) had contributed in order to see raised a 'sort of nationalist memorial' to their 'Homeric ancestors' (Jeffery in Pilides 2009, 93). Balanos and Jeffery had thus merged ancient Greece and the modern British Empire, in a way manifesting the labors of archaeologists in the field within the capital's core.[8]

Tunis's monumental Beaux-Arts Hôtel des Postes (or Post, Telephone, and Telegraph headquarters, PTT) exemplifies what historian François Béguin labeled the 'Style of the Conqueror', a bold imperialist aesthetic that contrasted with the more contextual Arabizing 'Style of the Protector' that came into favor after 1900 in Tunisia

Figure 7: The dedicatory plaque and Queen Victoria's cypher above the entry to the Cyprus Museum, Nicosia, by Nicolaos Balanos and George Jeffery, 1909. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019.

(Béguin 1983: 13).[9] Designed by Henri Saladin, an archaeologist and architect trained at the Paris École, and inaugurated in 1892 (Bacha 2009: 215; 'Le nouvel hôtel des postes' 1892), it contained state-of-the art communications technology within a 'mountain of stone' that demonstrated the irrefutable fact that 'Tunisia has been occupied', according to a 1911 description of the imposing structure (Géniaux 1911: 534). The structure, like the opera houses, city halls, and train stations that dotted colonized cities the world-over, functioned symbolically as a 'French cultural emblem' that exemplified administrative modernity and control, as its networks reached deeply into Tunisia — for the exchange of information, collection of revenue, and potentially for observation — and to the opposite shore of the 'French lake' (Wright 1991: 78; Blais and Deprest 2012).

The PTT's tripartite central section and attic recall the Roman triumphal arch, while its flanking arcades remind one of both the iconic Rue de Rivoli in Paris (a frequently reproduced typology across French-occupied North Africa) and Tunisia's rustic ancient aqueducts (**Figures 8** and **9**). By appropriating the form of ancient ruins found in Tunisia and throughout the region — and presenting it in a fashion compatible with

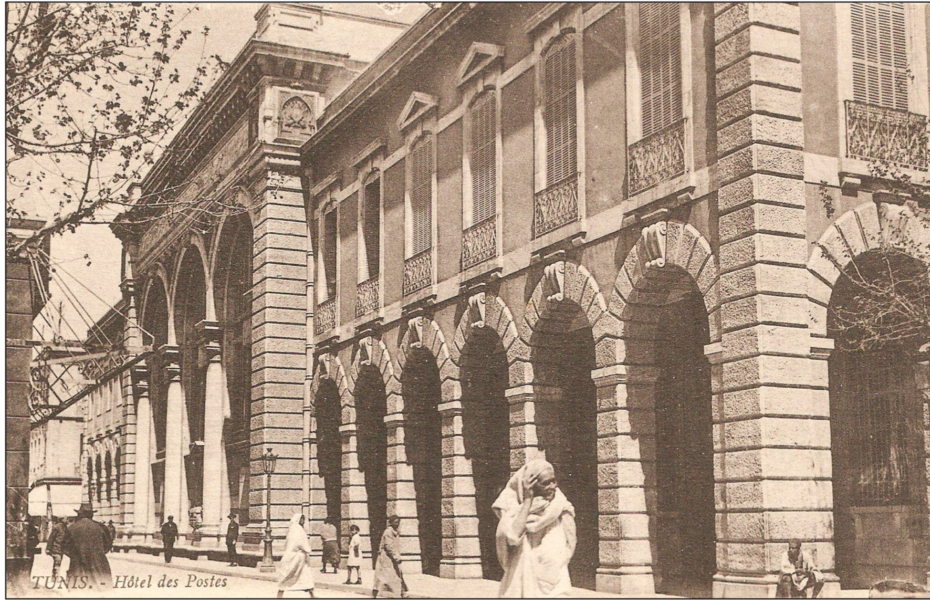

Figure 8: The Hôtel des Postes, Tunis, by Henri Saladin, 1892. Postcard, c. 1910. Collection of Daniel E. Coslett.

contemporary French Beaux-Arts idiom — French authorities substantiated their claim that the French Empire was the Roman Empire reborn. Indeed, the building manifests the views expressed by the governor of French-occupied Morocco, Hubert Lyautey, who in 1924 stated, ‘Here, in North Africa, we find everywhere the traces of Rome beneath our feet, which proves that we belong here, on the front lines of civilization’ (Ricard1924:2).TheRomanticcolonialist writer Louis Bertrand frequently echoed these sentiments and saw free-standing commemorative arches in particular as ‘indestructible trophies’ representing the ‘beautiful Latin idea of Triumph’ (Bertrand 1905: 245). The PTT’s architectural reference is thus charged with meaning in its particular context, and its interior further equated

Figure 9: The central bay of the Hôtel des Postes’s primary façade, Tunis, by Henri Saladin, 1892. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2023.

the French Empire with the Roman one. A massive map of Tunisia was painted in the central bay above the counter in the building's main hall, thereby illustrating the extent of France's mastery of Tunisian territory. Caduceus and cornucopia motifs rendered in mosaics referenced communication and abundance through relevant items associated with Mercury (the Roman messenger god) and Ceres (Rome's goddess of agriculture) in what had been characterized as the thriving 'breadbasket' of the ancient Empire (Davis 2007) (**Figure 10**).

Figure 10: Caduceus and cornucopia decoration at the Hôtel des Postes, Tunis, by Henri Saladin, 1892. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2013.

Nicosia's Cyprus Museum and Tunis's postal headquarters thus embodied the colonizers' infatuation with ancient Greece and Rome as idealized cultural and political points of origin. Through their architectural styles, these buildings made the power of both the British and French administrations apparent. While the complexities of contemporary culture and politics in Cyprus limited British association with the ancient Greek world more than the situation had with ancient Rome in Tunisia, as masters of knowledge, information, and correspondence, colonizers in each setting claimed a stake in Mediterranean antiquity and represented their dominance with columns, arcades, and historicist decorative motifs.

Early Christian Mediterranean

Christianity became a major religion in both Cyprus and Tunisia during the late Roman Empire and each is known to have hosted several important saints and martyrs. Traditional accounts based on the biblical book of Acts of the Apostles attribute the establishment of Christianity in Cyprus to Barnabas, and by the 4th century several saints ensured the widespread adoption of Christianity during the island's early Byzantine period (Runciman 1994: 136–44; Varnava 2009: 57–59). Owing to Cyprus's geography and religious history, Greek Orthodox Christianity had long been the country's dominant form of Christianity by the time of the British occupation, though 'Latin' or Western Christianity had been practiced by the island's French and Venetian rulers during the so-called 'Frankish period' spanning 1191 to 1571. In Tunisia, where Christianity was likely first adopted during the late 2nd century, the Arab conquests of the late 7th century resulted in Christianity's decline with Islam's quick ascent (Wilhite 2017: 79–107). Prior to that time Tunisia had been ruled by Germanic Vandals — who for a while had maintained allegiance to the Rome-based Church after having taken the territory from the Romans — were then supplanted by Byzantine Christians who ruled from 533 until the Muslim invasions (Edis 1999: 45–52; Wilhite 2017: 287–320). In the modern era, Roman Catholicism gained a foothold in Tunisia with the arrival of various European diplomats and merchants during the 17th and 18th centuries, but it was practiced by just a very small number of individuals in a land long associated with St. Augustin prior to the Protectorate. The British and French changed the nature of Christianity in Cyprus and Tunisia when they established themselves there, and both built structures to serve the spiritual needs of the colonizers in support of their respective empires.

The Catholic Church in North Africa operated as a de facto agent of the French Empire, or as one scholar has labeled it, a 'triumphalist colonial institution' for whom the occupation of Tunisia facilitated the so-called resurrection of Christianity there (de La Ferrière 2020: 417). Having previously first established themselves atop the ancient acropolis of Carthage (or Byrsa Hill) nearby, Catholic officials sought to monumentalize their presence in the center of the capital, opposite the headquarters of the French administration. Mindful that Carthage had been an important center of early Christianity in the region and its bishops supreme in Africa, a fact explicitly emphasized when Pope Leo XIII re-established the archepiscopal See of Carthage in 1884, the 1891 design competition announcement for the downtown cathedral declared that 'freedom is left to the architects for the choice of style', but it was 'preferred that the raised monument be a reproduction of one of the ancient Christian basilicas or ... temples of Tunisia' ('Concours publics' 1891). Charles Lavigerie, Tunisia's ambitious archbishop, appreciated what he saw as references to the early Christian basilica

from Béjà in the proposal by diocesan architect L. Bonnet-Labranche, whose work replaced the provisional church erected at the personal expense of Lavigerie upon the establishment of the protectorate in 1881 (**Figure 11**).[10] Bonnet-Labranche's 1897 Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul (a 16th-century Frenchman enslaved in Tunisia) and St. Olivia (a Sicilian woman martyred during the 5th century) was an eclectic building intended to represent continuity with ancient Christianity and 'mutual accord' among the colony's oft-antagonistic French and Italian, thus Catholic, factions (Coslett 2015: 364–66; Lavigerie 1890: 11). Not all appreciated the cathedral's charged appearance, however. 'It is not a building of any architectural merit', concluded R. Lambert Playfair in his 1892 *Handbook to the Mediterranean* (32). Similarly unimpressed, an American visitor, Emma Burbank Ayer, dismissed what was to her a 'rather ugly Cathedral with no especial style of architecture' in her 1911 travelogue (326).

The architectural evocation of early Christianity at the Tunis cathedral took several forms, including not only its dedication, but also its form, decoration, and material composition. The use of a block taken from the Damous el Karita basilica in Carthage as the building's cornerstone was indeed highly symbolic (Delattre and Lapeyre 1932: 3). Further reinforcing the cruciform plan's connection to Late Roman/early Christian precedents, masons used marble from an ancient Roman quarry in Djebel-Oust that had been reactivated for this project. When Louis Queyrel's domed towers were finally built in 1910 — using the then state-of-the-art Hennebique technique — its concrete was made from a mixture of crushed stone, also from Djebel-Oust, and water drawn from the spring at Zaghouan, which had been an important source of water for early Christian Carthage and was linked to Tunis via an ancient aqueduct that had been restored by French engineers. Hemispherical arches with blocky capitals, a dome on pendentives,

Figure 11: The Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul (and St. Olivia), Tunis, by L. Bonnet-Labranche, 1897. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2024.

historicist sculptures, and mosaic decorations also advanced the claim of continuity within the cathedral, as did Georges Le Mare's 1930 frescoes of early African saints and martyrs framed by the Byzantine Revival arcade of the central apse triforium (Coslett 2015: 363–66; Lemare 1976) (**Figure 12**).[11]

Figure 12: Tunisia's martyrs in frescoes by Georges Le Mare, 1930, in the primary apse of Tunis's Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul. Photograph. Tunis, Archives de la Prélature, carton Paroisses Cathédrale de Tunis 1.

As explored by Mark Crinson within the context of British-occupied Egypt, Byzantine architecture proved less compelling for 19th-century British designers who had no Mediterranean coastline, saw in it no direct connection to British nationalism, and were put off by its association with eastern Orthodoxy (1996: 92).[12] Colonialist references to early Christianity were therefore less common in Cyprus than they were in Tunisia, where the Orthodox Church of Cyprus remained very much alive on the island. This likely complicated the appropriation of architectural forms that would have read as contemporary Greek-Cypriot, rather than as a British revival of something long dormant. This was simply not the case in Muslim Tunisia, where a millennium of Islamic rule had made space for French 'restoration.' That said, there were moments where this did occur, such as in the case of the Anglican Church of St. Barnabas in Limassol; opened in 1915, the building's simple plan, squat proportions, and hemispherical apse, in addition to its name, recall Cyprus's early Christian era (St. Barnabas' Church, Limassol 2022). The steeply pitched roof and timber trusses used in the Church of St. George in the Forest, located in the Troodos Hill Station retreat, drew from Cypriot Byzantine traditions (Georghiou 2013: 154–58).

While it may be tempting to see in Nicosia's neo-Gothic Church of St. Paul — the first modern English church on the island — links with the island's medieval history, during which a number of Gothic buildings were raised across the country, the building

arguably refers more directly to 19th-century British historicism (**Figures 13** and **14**).[13] Indeed, in its pointed arches, trefoil tracery, squat tower, and rose window one finds the Victorian penchant for Gothic Revival transplanted to the eastern Mediterranean rather than an explicit High Gothic monumentality (Given 2005: 208; Georghiou 2013: 78–82: Schaar, Given, and Theocharous 1995: 27–29). Opened in 1885 on the unstable ground of St. George's Hill (site of an early Christian church), then dismantled, relocated, and rebuilt in 1893, William Williams's relatively humble cruciform building — which was dedicated to the apostle Paul, who with St. Barnabas had helped establish Christianity on the island — served the small and hastily organized extension of the Church of England in Cyprus. Officials strove to make clear that the Anglican Church, represented by this building and its 'English' style, had no plans to interfere with Orthodox affairs or convert locals (Christofides 2014: 94–129).[14] Though not a neoclassical building inspired by Roman imperial power, as deployed in Nicosia, the Victorian Gothic Revival

Figure 13: The Church of St. Paul, Nicosia, by William Williams, 1885 (relocated 1893). Photograph c. 1910. Nicosia, Press Information Office Photo Archive, 0513-013-FY.

Figure 14: Interior of the Church of St. Paul, Nicosia, by William Williams, 1885 (relocated 1893). The sanctuary was reworked by George Jeffery, who designed the English 15th-century style stone reredos with statues of Sts. Paul and Barnabas in 1904 (Jeffery 1983: 293–94). The nave was extended by two bays in 1952. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019.

may be here interpreted as a less militaristic 'Style of the Conqueror' paid for by English donations collected in both Britain and Cyprus. Appeals to unity among Greek and Anglican Christians notwithstanding, the Church of St. Paul forges an assimilationist link between Cyprus and England — and to England's medieval Christian identity — that facilitated the occupation of Cyprus and the spiritual needs of a small Anglican community, literally in the name of the island's most noteworthy early Christian figures.[15] The church therefore inserts the British Empire into the early Christian Mediterranean.

The roles played by Christian institutions in the establishment of modern empires warrant further consideration, particularly when considering activities beyond traditional missionary work (i.e., proselytizing), which was not typically done in Tunisia and Cyprus. It is clear, however, that the Catholic and Anglican Churches were important because they served the spiritual needs of the colonizers and contributed to legitimacy claims made by the French and British establishments there. Whereas Tunisia was colonized substantially, and at the time of independence in 1956 there were 78 parishes with more than 100 churches serving 250,000 Catholics, Cyprus was not, owing to the absence of arable land for British cultivation and no official immigration policy. The Anglican establishment there was far smaller than was the Catholic presence in Tunisia (De La Ferrière 2020: 416; Gekas 2012: 83; Flinn 1933: 1–2).[16] As explored

above, this comparison reveals meaningful differences in the contexts, however, given the state of Christianity in North Africa and in Cyprus, and thus considerable differences in the ecclesiastical architectures produced. While the appropriation of early Christian imagery in each place was different, the deployment of Crusader histories proved quite appealing in both sacred and secular terms.

Medieval Crusader Mediterranean

Cyprus and Tunisia were both drawn into the Crusades during the medieval era, and the influence of these episodes on modern colonialist discourse and architecture transcended the immediate significance of the English and French incursions that occurred during the late 12th and 13th centuries. Indeed, Richard I and Louis IX (a patron saint of France) spent just over a week and about a month in Cyprus and Tunisia respectively, but their incursions reflects the broader interconnectedness of the medieval Mediterranean. More than just peripheral stopping points, the places were contested sites of contact and nodes in the political, religious, and commercial networks that bound east to west. Whereas the early Christian history exploited by British and French administrations was distant, these Crusader histories served as direct couplings forged between European royalty and these occupied territories.

The deployment of France's Crusader past in Tunisia took the form of a Gothic Revival chapel inaugurated atop Carthage's Byrsa Hill in 1841 (**Figures 15** and **16**) and an adjacent primatial cathedral and scholasticate-museum complex raised during the 1880s. These buildings were products of an explicit appeal to Louis IX's brief stay in Carthage and its interpretation as the origin of French colonization. This attribution was made clear by Ernest Babelon, a visiting Frenchman who in 1896 asserted that 'Carthaginian Africa has become French Africa: it is we, at present, who are the Romans'. He added, 'We do not forget that the first foundations of this conquest were laid in the 13th century by King Louis IX who, on 17 July 1270, [came] … to conquer North Africa for civilization', a reference to the sainted king who died of dysentery eight days after his arrival in Carthage during the Eighth Crusade (Babelon 1896: 116).[17] Given the importance of St. Louis and developing medievalism in 19th-century France, Charles X secured land for a commemorative monument atop of the Byrsa Hill from Tunisia's ruler Hussein II Bey in 1830. The domed chapel, designed by Charles-Joseph Jourdain, fulfilled King Louis Philippe's wish that it 'recall, by its architectural style, the era to which belongs the name of Saint Louis' ('Nouvelles et faits divers' 1840; Coslett 2023: 424–27).[18] With its statue of Louis IX and dedicatory plaques in both French and Arabic, the Gothic Revival building became a center of French devotion in Tunisia — a so-called 'French oasis' amidst the ruins of Carthage (Gandolphe 1951: 290, Rocca 1862: 84).

Figure 15: The Chapel of St. Louis, Carthage, Tunisia, by Charles-Joseph Jourdain, 1841. Collections ND Phot. 'CARTHAGE. – Ancienne Chapelle Saint-Louis', c. 1910. Tunis, Archives de la Prélature, carton Paroisses Cathédrale de Tunis 1.

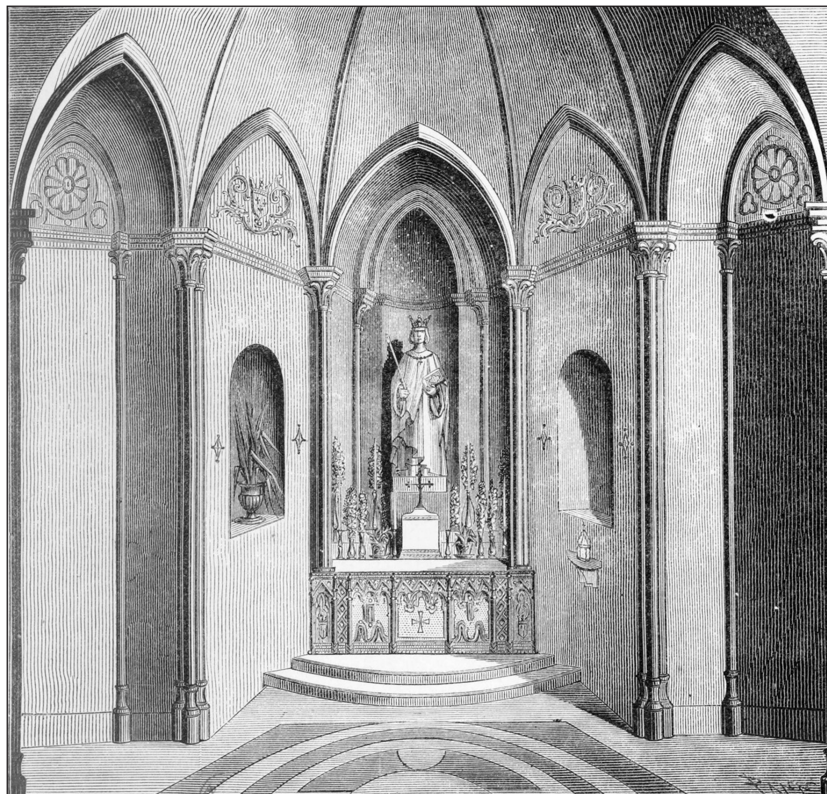

Figure 16: The Chapel of St. Louis, in Carthage, Tunisia, by Charles-Joseph Jourdain, 1841. From Sainte-Marie (1878: n.p.). Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France.

When Lavigerie's White Fathers (members of his Société des Missionaires d'Afrique colloquially known by the color of their vestments) took custody of the St. Louis Chapel in 1875, under the leadership of Alfred-Louis Delattre they accelerated excavation of the surrounding area, further crowding the walled chapel enclave with statue fragments, sarcophagi, and other antiquities. A few rooms were then dedicated to the display of Punic, Roman, early Christian, and medieval artifacts within the White Fathers' new scholasticate building adjacent to the chapel (Effros 2019; Freed 2008). Christian and medieval-era items were displaced in the building's 'Crusader Room', the walls and ceiling of which were covered with dramatic frescoes celebrating the arrival, acts, death, and apotheosis of Louis IX (who appeared alongside figures modeled on Lavigerie and Delattre) during his brief stay in Carthage (Coslett 2023: 429–31) (**Figure 17**).

Figure 17: St. Louis IX on the battlefield, as depicted in the Crusader Room frescoes by J. L'Alouette, 1886, as found inside the Lavigerie Museum in Carthage, Tunisia. 'CARTHAGE – Musée Lavigerie – Salle de la Croisade, La Bataille de St-Louis'. Postcard, c. 1910. Collection of Daniel E. Coslett.

The establishment of the protectorate in 1881, however, compelled Lavigerie to champion the construction of a still grander monument, a church to be the highest-ranking Catholic church in Africa (**Figures 18** and **19**). The resulting Cathedral of St. Louis by Joseph Pougnet was paid for by donations from the French noble families whose coats of arms eventually dotted its colorful interior (**Figure 20**). While contemporary commentators frequently noted the building's stylistic hybridity — 'an admirable ensemble' of the so-called Arab style of Algeria, Sicilian Romanesque, and Byzantine,

Figure 18: The Cathedral of St. Louis de Carthage in Carthage, Tunisia, by Joseph Pougnet, 1890. 'Carthage – La Cathédrale St. Louis.' C. Photograph c. 1899. US Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsc-06011. http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsc.06011.

Figure 19: The interior of the Cathedral of St. Louis de Carthage in Carthage, Tunisia, by Joseph Pougnet, 1890. Collection of Daniel E. Coslett.

wrote one French visitor in 1898 — its Gothic elements included its basilica plan, fleur-de-lys crenelation, and the aforementioned heraldic plaques (de Beauregard 1898: 48). Also dedicated in the name of St. Cyprian when it opened in 1890, the eclectic building ensured a monumental French Catholic presence — with a medieval flair — at the heart of the region's most prominent ancient and early Christian city (Coslett 2023: 428–35.)[19]

In 1191, Cyprus passed into the hands of England's Crusader-king, Richard I, 'the Lionheart', while he was en route to Acre. On the island for about a month, he married Berengaria of Navarre in Limassol (in what remains the only wedding of an English monarch to occur overseas) and deposed Isaac, the local ruler. Eager to proceed to Palestine and in need of cash, Richard I promptly sold the island to the Knights Templar. They, in turn, forfeited it to the

Figure 20: Several of the approximately 230 donors' arms displayed throughout the Cathedral of St. Louis de Carthage in Carthage, Tunisia, by Joseph Pougnet, 1890. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2024.

Figure 21: The British Colonial administration's badge for the Crown Colony of Cyprus featuring the lions of Richard I. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019, from a document dated 1935 in the Cyprus State Archives, Nicosia, SA1/1173/33/1.

French Lusignan dynasty, which governed there from 1192 until 1489 when Venice took possession of the island. The so-called Frankish Period of Cyprus's history thus began with the brief stay of Richard I — 'the first English occupation of Cyprus' — a point frequently emphasized by the British and reflected in the colonial administration's use of lions drawn from the king's arms as its emblem after 1905 (Storrs and O'Brien 1930: 17; Runciman 1994: 173–74; Schaar, Given, and Theocharous 1995: 62) (**Figure 21**). Indeed, Richard had become 'the most romanticised and, with the exception of the mythical King Arthur, the most fictionalized' English king, making him a key figure in nationalist discourse during the 19th century (Varnava 2009: 45). Elements of Gothic Revival architecture came to represent him and the broader medieval era of Cyprus's history, which elided the brief British incursion and prolonged rule by French Lusignans.[20]

The original British headquarters in Cyprus, called Government House, was a prefabricated wooden structure designed by the War Office for the tropical climate of Sri Lanka, its intended destination. Diverted to Cyprus in 1878, it was erected on high ground outside the walled core of Nicosia — ‘a splendid position’ amidst ‘considerable plantations’, noted Playfair, the guidebook author — as a temporary structure (1892: 181). Its U-shaped plan was rational and efficient, recalling military barracks, and its internal elevations were wrapped in a shaded verandah in the fashion of a bungalow. Though well suited to the heat of the Cypriot summer, Government House’s open layout and lack of fireplaces were not ideal for the cold and windy winter. Rather than build a permanent stone structure in its place as anticipated, various governors had sections replaced with brick and stone and in 1900–01 a lounge and courtyard-facing wall were added using neo-Gothic pointed arches (**Figure 22**).[21] Heating and electricity were installed, and other piecemeal upgrades were made over the years (Lobb 1926; Georghiou 2013: 53–54; Severis and Given 2009: 59–61). English ‘relics’ were eventually added to the grounds; a 16th-century cannon shipped as a gift from Henry VIII to the Grand Master of the Order of St. John and found off the coast of Famagusta in 1907 was installed in the gardens, as were several pointed arches taken from Nicosia’s Lusignan Palace, and a doorway from the nearby Bedestan (which some believed to have been the Church of St. Nicholas of the English) (Severis and Given 2009: 63; Georghiou 2013: 58).

Figure 22: A Gothic Revival addition to the original Government House, in Nicosia, Cyprus, designed by the War Office, 1878. The addition dates to the early 1900s. Photograph, c. 1910. Press Information Office Sukey Cameron Archive, Nicosia.

Anti-colonial resistance resulted in the destruction of Government House by a group of Greek Cypriots championing independence and *enosis*, or union with Greece, in 1931 (Severis and Given 2009: 65–67; Holland and Markides 2006: 182–88). Governor Ronald Storrs imposed a tax on the Greek Cypriot population to fund the construction of a new building and hired Austen St. Barbe Harrison, chief architect of Palestine's Public Works Department and a former employee of Edwin Lutyens. Harrison's proposal was grand and too expensive for Storrs's successor, however, who preferred a more modest building. Thus, Governor Reginald Stubbs contracted Maurice Webb to design a structure that demonstrated 'artistic merit which will be a suitable residence for His Majesty's Representative, built in a style conformable to local traditions and, so far as practicable, with local material and labour' (Dawe 1933; Georghiou 2013: 188–95; Schaar, Given, and Theocharous 1995: 75–78). The resulting building repeated the U-shaped barracks plan and maintained the notion that the British were ruling in a Crusader Mediterranean.

Webb's new Government House proclaims British dominance, a fact rendered most apparent by the huge heraldic insignia carved into its stone façade (**Figure 23**). Lions from the coats of arms of Richard I and the Lusignans were sculpted into the portico's lateral elevations, suggesting that British rule was founded on its medieval precedents. Still, the building is an eclectic pastiche rather than an assertive demonstration of the classicizing 'Conqueror's Style.' In blending many of the island's traditions into what the British saw as the 'Cypriot mélange', it expressed 'the architectural definition of "Cypriot" identity in the ruler's residence', which was in the traditional sense seen as 'the embodiment of the state itself' (Given 2005: 212; Caröe 1932).[22] Arguably compatible with Orientalist 'Protector's Style' structures built in North Africa by French administrations eager to assuage anti-colonial resentment through culturally sensitive architecture (Béguin 1983), Government House again included Gothic arches and tracery, but also Ottoman (or Byzantine) domes,[23] both English and Venetian lions, Ottoman-inspired paneling, curtains embroidered with Lusignan heraldry, and a Crusader castle-like central mass reminiscent of the boxy Kolossi Castle. Each stylistic element represented an aspect of Cyprus's history, and the sum of the parts produced a statement of British control, much the way it had in British use of Indo-Saracenic in South Asia and Edwin Lutyens's Viceroy's House (1929) for New Delhi. Historic authenticity was confirmed again by the placement of additional artifacts throughout Government House's grounds. Two 15th-century cannons, a pair of Gothic arches taken from the Lusignan palace, and other medieval building fragments joined Henry VIII's cannon (Given 2005: 211–12) (**Figure 24**).

Figure 23: The primary entry portico of the new Government House in Nicosia, Cyprus, by Maurice Webb, 1937. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019.

Figure 24: The rear of the new Government House in Nicosia, Cyprus, by Maurice Webb, 1937, featuring arches taken from the city's razed Lusignan Palace. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019.

Overtly ancient Greek references are conspicuously absent from Government House's exterior — likely a response to the burning of the original residence by members of the island's Greek-Cypriot community. References to Cyprus's Orthodox

history do exist, but they are relatively discreet; its main door was copied from that of Ayios Chrysostomos monastery, and the stacked arcades of its rear (round arches stacked over pointed ones, both with blocky Byzantine capitals) were inspired by the monastery at Myrtou (**Figure 25**). That the central portico's triple arches were drawn from the Acheiropoietos Monastery church in Lapithos (**Figure 26**), as was noted in an internal memo on the building's design, confirms Given's conclusion (2005: 212) that what was read as particularly Greek, Byzantine, or Gothic, rather than just Cypriot, was not so obvious in Cyprus, where eclecticism had been a longstanding practice (Severis and Given 2009: 69).[24] Government House was indeed stylistically Cypriot, but Cyprus was — according to colonialist perspectives — a product of many Mediterraneans; it was collectively ancient, early Christian, Crusader, and briefly British too.

Figure 25: The rear arcade of the new Government House in Nicosia, Cyprus, by Maurice Webb, 1937. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2019.

In Tunisia the Catholic Church was the primary instigator of medievalist allusions throughout the protectorate period, a fact reinforced by the replacement of the dilapidated Carthage chapel in 1950–51 and the installation of an open-air altar and over-life-sized effigy of Louis IX (Coslett 2023: 435–37) (**Figure 27**). The religious nature of such appeals to the past applied less in Cyprus, where the government referenced Richard I more directly as a secular leader — he was, after all, never sainted. There the less prominent Anglican Church did build the Gothic Revival Church of St.

Figure 26: The Acheiropoietos Monastery church, Lapithos, Cyprus (est. 11th century). Photograph by Shirazibustan, 1973. Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Παναγία_Άχειροποίητος_in_1973_35_mm.jpg.

Figure 27: The effigy of St. Louis IX, by Martin, ca. 1951, from the redesigned garden of St. Louis on the Byrsa Hill in Carthage, Tunisia, by Zehrfuss and Auproux, 1950–51. Photograph by Daniel E. Coslett, 2023.

Paul, but given its desire to avoid interference with the Orthodox Church in Cyprus, the style evokes Victorian historicism rather than triumphant medievalism. These cases reveal the complexity of meanings in colonialist Christian architecture.

Conclusions, Comparison, and More Mediterraneans

These are but a few examples that demonstrate the degree to which two European powers subordinated archaeology and selected histories to its colonial ambitions. It is not an exhaustive account, nor are they mutually exclusive frameworks. On the contrary, the presented conceptions existed simultaneously and often in the same spaces, suggesting that not only was there no single Mediterranean, but rather there were multiple Mediterraneans — sometimes complementary and sometimes competing — within the project of empire. Indeed, by appropriating several Mediterranean histories and identities in Cyprus and Tunisia, European discourse demonstrated the hubris at the core of colonialist claims.

Through the architectures introduced above, British and French authorities and designers claimed a central role in their conceptions of an early Christian, Greco-Roman, and Crusader Mediterranean. They did this in most cases without actually copying historic forms, and without appealing to precise history, creating instead something new: novel conceptions of the Mediterranean that manifested in what Cohen considers 'architecture *in a colonial situation*', the eclecticism of which bore a salience that set it apart from that of contemporary Europe (2006: 354; emphasis in original). Seen from a critical heritage perspective, such work constitutes what geographer David Lowenthal considers the 'fabrication of heritage', or the presentation of strategically mythologized pasts that, unlike allegedly truthful history, 'exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets' for present purposes (Lowenthal 1998: 7). In this case, the aim was the union of European outsiders in Cyprus and Tunisia. This 'imagined community' of history-bound colonizers — to recall Anderson's concept — legitimated and fortified the dominant demographic within the imperial order (Anderson 2006). Colonial efforts to institutionalize such notions generated what Laurajane Smith would label 'authorized heritage discourse' in later contexts, the reinforcing effects of which inspired both official and informal (or popular) architectures and associated media (Smith 2006).

Despite shifting colonial priorities and the complexity of Cyprus's and Tunisia's engagement with Europe and the Mediterranean, it is clear that pre-modern history was an essential component of the colonizers' frame of reference and imagined identity. Archaeological artifacts served as a theoretical foundation for European colonialist discourses in the region; they bestowed legitimacy upon the excavator and inspired the historicist architectures that they in turn complemented. This relationship can be seen clearly in the display of early Christian and medieval artifacts in the Carthage Crusader Room and the placement of architectural fragments on the grounds of Government House in Nicosia. These buildings were constructed for the benefit of

colonizers, but they were seen and used by the colonized as well, and thus served as explicit demonstrations of Western imperialism. Symbolically potent architectures, these structures communicated power and invited engagement. The destruction of the first Government House in Nicosia and the appropriation of the second as the Cypriot Presidential Palace after 1960, and the maintenance of the Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul in postcolonial Tunis, for example, reflect the salience of such designs.

In presenting a sampling of colonialist Mediterranean constructs and supportive architectures, this article recognizes the inevitable flattening out of differences and over-simplification of complexities, both challenging pitfalls of comparative studies. Though its limited scope and depth necessitate both, the study does show that the cumulative effects of the buildings considered expose the self-aggrandizing nature of architecture designed to legitimize the colonial presence while undermining indigenous identity and ideologies that might jeopardize the Eurocentric hierarchy. The past was thus used to support the colonialist Catholic Church in Tunisia, tourism there and in Cyprus, as well as nationalist unity among Cypriots (to counter enthusiasm for annexation to Greece, a post-WWI process that Holland and Markides label 'dehellenizing' [2006: 184]) and concord among Tunisia's contentious European factions. There is of course even more to the story though. For example, thinking beyond French and British imperial engagements with the Mediterranean Sea, as scholars such as Mia Fuller and Brian McLaren have, the pursuit of *Mediterranità* (Mediterranean-ness) motivated Italian architects working in Italy and occupied Libya (Fuller 2007: 115–20; McLaren 2006: 145–217). There, modernist designers sought an Italian architecture of trans-Mediterranean relevance that suited the discourse of yet another 'Roman Empire reborn'.

The comparative method advanced here is productive. By focusing on an assortment of buildings from different imperial contexts, several particular interpretations of the Mediterranean can be isolated that privileged certain pasts and forms of colonial dominance. Indeed, questions regarding one setting, building, or concept can elicit the same and new inquiries about another. The result need not be a pair of identical or opposing narratives, but rather accounts that reveal critical similarities and differences. This article presents a snapshot of a dynamic situation; it is an invitation to further study and (re)consider colonial-era structures and spaces across the Mediterranean. Such a comparative method is, after all, a process, rather than an end.

Notes

[1] Zeynep Celik's *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914* (2008) is a rare example of an explicitly comparative architectural history.

[2] Hélène Blais and Florence Deprest note that the Mediterranean Sea, prior to France's occupation of Algeria in 1830, had been 'considered and charted mainly from a European point of view, the establishment of a military settlement in Algeria offered a change of perspective. The Mediterranean was now simultaneously observed from Paris and Algiers, thus shrinking the overall view. Increasingly, it was the more familiar expanse between France and Algeria, which was being considered, and considered as French' (2012: 34).

[3] Helaine Silverman (2011) offers a comprehensive literature review of the subject. David Lowenthal, Benedict Anderson, and Laurajane Smith are scholars whose works are particularly relevant here.

[4] On 18th- and 19th-century travelers' conceptions of Cyprus as both 'eastern' and 'classical', see Gibson (2023).

[5] Cyprus became a British protectorate in 1878 (in a deal struck at the 1878 Congress of Berlin among European powers that, among other things, permitted France to occupy Tunisia) as a check to potential Russian expansion into Ottoman territory, though it technically remained a part of the Ottoman Empire under British administration until World War I. Following nine years as a unilaterally annexed island, in 1925 Cyprus was declared a Crown Colony, which it remained until independence in 1960. Weakened by pressures related to modernizing reforms and European intrusion, Tunisia became a nominally sovereign French protectorate in 1881 and remained one until 1956. Despite the maintenance of the Tunisian Bey (hereditary ruler) throughout the protectorate period, France controlled Tunisia's state apparatus after 1884 (Varnava 2009: 8–44; Holland 2012: 111; Perkins 2014: 15–43; Lewis 2014: 1–27).

[6] Occupied Cyprus, said to have been 'a backwater in Britain's overseas *imperium*', was considered of nominal strategic importance, save perhaps for safeguarding routes to India — a point rendered moot by the occupation of Egypt in 1882. The lack of a substantial port was also a noted drawback (Holland and Markides, 2006: 164). According to Andrekos Varnava, however, assessments of Cyprus's utility for the empire depended in large part on the British political party in power at different times (2009: 202–45). 'High politics and high finance' were the primary concerns for the British in their decision to occupy Cyprus, according to Diana Markides (2016: 88), who notes a longstanding exaggeration of strategic potential. The island's inadequacy as a military base was well known and a source of imperial revenue was needed, she says.

[7] There were a few neoclassical buildings raised by the Cypriot Public Works Department, though they tended to reflect British Renaissance Revival traditions rather than overt academic or imperialist neoclassicism. See, for example, Nicosia's General Post Office and Limassol's hospital (Georghiou 2013: 142–47; Schaar, Given, and Theocharous 1995: 61).

[8] One wonders why a more obvious association with the Roman Empire was not chosen, given British affinity for its history and the distance it would have afforded from contemporary politics (see Hingley 2000; Majeed 1999). On the importance afforded to Roman archaeology by the postcolonial Cypriot government, see Gordon (2012) and Gordon (2024: 633). On the same in Tunisia, see Lafrenz Samuels (2012).

[9] The transition between neoclassical/Beaux-Arts 'Style of the Conqueror' and subsequent Arabizing 'Style of the Protector' in North Africa paralleled the transition between French policies of assimilation and association (Béguin 1983; Betts 1961).

[10] On Lavigerie's earlier work as Archbishop of Algiers (a position he assumed in 1867 and retained while Archbishop of Carthage from 1884 until his death in 1892), see O'Donnell (1979) and Peterson (2022).

[11] The cathedral's twin towers and arched façade recall Léon Vaudoyer's eclectic Marseilles Cathedral of St. Mary Major, which according to Mark Crinson represented a statement of Pan-Mediterraneanism (Crinson 1996: 92). Along those lines, the Tunis cathedral may be viewed as a North African echo of such a claim (Coslett 2015: 367).

[12] The presence of 'Gallo-Byzantine' churches in France's Périgord region also facilitated French interest in the style, according to Crinson (1996: 92).

[13] Anglican officials had first attempted to repurpose the Bedestan within Nicosia's city center for use as a cathedral because it was said to have been the Church of St. Nicholas of the English during the medieval era, but its proximity to the adjacent Ayia Sophia mosque made it impossible, according to standing Ottoman law (Georghiou 2013: 78). On the building, see Playfair (1892: 182).

[14] The popular *Handbook of Cyprus* notes that Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark converted the Roman proconsul in 45 CE, making Cyprus the 'first country to be governed by a Christian' (Storrs and O'Brien 1930: 15). The church appears to have gone unmentioned in contemporary travel literature or guides.

[15] At the 1886 consecration of the new church building, the presiding official noted, according to an observer, that although it had been 'designed for Englishmen [it] was free to all, be they Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Turks, or infidels'. The priest hoped that the 'comely edifice' would function as a place of communication and unity (but not explicit proselytizing) rather than of antagonism among English and Greek Christians, between whom relations had been strained ('From a Correspondent' 1886; Christofides 2014: 128–29; Holland and Markides 2006: 167).

[16] Tunisia's Catholic population tripled in the five years following the establishment of the Protectorate, numbering 75,000 in 1896 (O'Donnell 1979: 49–76 and 149). The census of 1891 put Cyprus's population at 209,286, excluding the 674 Britons in residence, the majority of whom were likely members of the Church of England (Hook 2009: 196).

[17] The inclusion of Louis IX, in addition to Lusignans of Cyprus (see below), in a listing of Frenchmen who 'extended the empire' and made France's 'name loved overseas' on the northwest façade of Albert Laprade's 1931 Museum of the Colonies in Paris confirms that these individuals were then considered colonizers rather than military heroes.

[18] Playfair, the British guidebook author, was not a fan of the building: 'Regarding the style and architecture of the chapel, the less said the better' (1892: 34). French commentators were, perhaps not surprisingly, generally less critical.

[19] That designs for a far more Byzantine complex were not adopted underscores the significance of the final pastiche (Coslett 2023: 434–35).

[20] English claims to Cyprus were never entirely settled, despite its sale to Guy de Lusignan. According to Varnava, it remained within the 'English imperial imagination' well into the 14th century (2009: 46–48).

[21] A drawing in the Cyprus State Archives (SA1/2937/99) illustrates what may be a proposed extension or renovation of a portion of the building, making extensive use of Gothic motifs, including quatrefoil fenestration and pointed arches.

[22] For a contemporary perspective on the eclectic nature of Cypriot architecture, see Caröe (1932). This author notes that the original version of this text was lost in the 1931 fire that destroyed Government House (45).

[23] The domes here may have been read as Byzantine or Ottoman in origin, but also as more generically 'Oriental', and thus 'local' or appropriate (Schaar, Given, and Theocharous 1995: 78).

[24] Shedding some light on the narrowness of British perspectives, the same 'History of Government House' pamphlet claims that 'the only "traditions" in Cyprus appeared to be French Gothic in the castles and churches of the Middle Ages and the monastic buildings of the Greek-Orthodox Church' (Severis and Given 2009: 69). While pointed arches, ultimately derived from medieval precedents on the island, had indeed made their way into Cypriot architecture (as Given notes in 2005: 207–208), it would seem that for some at least, the medieval Gothic connection was important.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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