

# CYPRUS SCENES

## The Church of Our Lady of the Golden City



Picture: Tony Benson

Walk down a quiet side street from the hustle and bustle of the harbour area in Paphos and you come to extensive ruins and a small church surrounded by trees. The church is the fifteenth-century church of Ayia Khrysopolitissa, the Church of our Lady of the Golden City. By favour of the Greek Orthodox bishop of Paphos it is now shared between local Roman Catholics and Anglicans, the latter mainly British émigrés and tourists, but it was built originally by the descendants of the Crusaders, who set up a kingdom in Cyprus after they were driven from the Holy Land. I do not know the origin of the name, but it is an interesting echo of Isaiah 14:4, which refers to Babylon as “the golden city” or “exactress of gold” (mg.). The Church down the ages, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox, has certainly been an “exactress of gold”, to support its extensive network of clergy and array of magnificent buildings.

The present church is not particularly magnificent, but the church that preceded it certainly was. The extensive ruins in the picture are of a huge basilica, built at the end of the fourth century at about the time the Roman Empire divided into its eastern and western parts as predicted in Nebuchadnezzar’s image dream. It was built about sixty years after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

In a short space of time Christianity went from being the religion of a persecuted minority, meeting furtively behind closed doors, to a religion which flaunted itself with some of the most magnificent buildings ever constructed on our planet. This particular church did not last many centuries, however, being demolished by the Arab conquerors of Cyprus in 653, and becoming largely lost to view till revealed by the spade of the twentieth-century archaeologist.—*Tony Benson*