

## Venetian Walls of Nicosia: Between Kyrenia Gate - Barbaro Bastion

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### Abstract

Nicosia today has the characteristics of being the only divided city in Europe. By examining the inside of the walls, one observes that the structure of the city is determined by the circular plan of the walls that were constructed during the Venetian period. There are 11 bastions on the walls and three Venetian gates, namely Kyrenia Gate, Famagusta Gate and Paphos Gate, were originally designed to allow entrance to the city that is encircled by the walls. Nicosia continued to be the islands capital which has fallen under Ottoman rule in between 1571-1878. In the period of British occupation 1878-1960, as a result of the increasing population, the city of Nicosia overflowed the walls and developed by spreading beyond the city walls and 8 new passages were opened. The organic fabric of the walled city, with the establishment of buffer zones after the peace operation of 1974, resulted in the division of the island that divided the capital city into two.

In 1931, because of the increased vehicle needs through the north side, the walls around the Kyrenia Gate (Porta del Provveditore) were trimmed and designed as a single monumental building. Between Kyrenia Gate and Barbaro bastion wall height is lower than the existing. Public lavatory and 9 small shops were inserted. Sitting steps were designed on the walls and two stairs were constructed to reach these areas. To give an access from the moat to the inner city there is a passage. In this context, identifying changes of the Kyrenia Gate-Barbaro bastion site, during this historic period, is the main goal of this study. Decisions with regard to these walls and observations to be made on right places to determine the changes are main focuses of the study.

**Keywords:** Venetian walls, Nicosia, history, Cyprus.

### 1. Introduction

As the third largest island in the Mediterranean, Cyprus was home to various cultures in various historical periods thanks to its geographical location. All these cultures marked the island with their own experiences and added value to it with the traces they left behind. Nicosia, which was one of its most important cities throughout history, became the capital during the Arab raids in the seventh century and preserved its capital status for approximately 1400 years until our day (Hakeri, 1992). The city walls were built during the rule of Guy de Lusignan, then destroyed in the Venetian period and rebuilt to take on their

present form (Fig. 1). Therefore, these walls bear witness to a whole history from that time up until today contributing invaluable experiences of different civilizations to the city history. When the conflicts between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities from the second half of the twentieth century culminated in the division of the island as north and south, Nicosia was affected as the capital of both communities and the remaining walls marked this division cutting through the city. When each community made their own decisions and interventions on these walls, despite the shared experiences of the past,

it took its toll on the fortifications and the integrity of the walls.

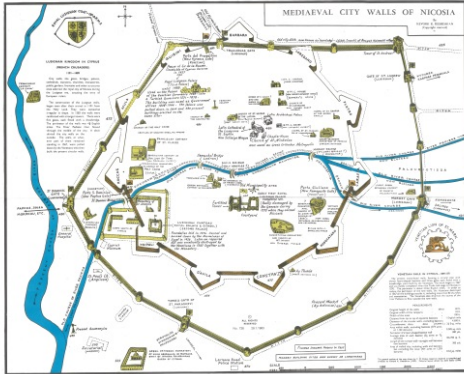


Fig. 1. Lusignan and Venetian walls (Kevork K. Keshishian, 1978).

This study is based on the observations and examinations on the city walls of Nicosia against this historical background, focusing on the differences observed on the extent of the wall between Kyrenia Gate and the Barbaro Bastion, their shapes in specific periods in the history of the island and their current condition.

## 2. Kyrenia Gate, Barbaro Bastion, and the City Walls

### 2.1. Venetian Period 1492-1571

**Kyrenia Gate:** The gate was named *Porta Del Provveditore* (Kyrenia) after Francesco Barbaro, the Venetian *Provveditore* (military governor) who contributed greatly to the construction of the city walls. It is located to the north of the city walls. It forms a short arched passageway constructed in 1562 according to the sign on the structure **Barbaro Bastion:** The bastion is also named after the Venetian *Provveditore* Francesco Barbaro who played a major role in the construction of the city walls (Gürkan, 1996).

### 2.2. Ottoman Period 1571-1878

**Kyrenia Gate:** Ottomans made some changes on the gates of the walls of Nicosia. A photograph from the Erşener archives taken outside the city walls shows the changes made during the Ottoman period in 1878, the year the British arrived

at the island (Fig. 2). The rectangular marble slab with the Sultan's *tughra* depicts the repair performed on the gate during the Ottoman period in 1821. During the reign of Sultan Mahmud II the structure underwent a restoration and a domed, four-corner room was built on the door (Gürkan, 1996). In addition to the east corner of the domed room viewing west, another room with a double-gabled roof was built on the fortification wall with a connection almost adjacent to the eastern corner of the domed room. To the west of this domed space, a stone wall was constructed with holes or openings for cannons.



Fig. 2. Kyrenia Gate (Erdal Erşener Archive).

The arched door opens to the view of stone buildings inside the city walls. Another name of the Kyrenia Gate is *Kızılküle*, the “Red Tower” and it is alleged to be given due to the blood shed in the violent battles during the Venetian-Ottoman War. However, there is no mention of a violent conflict in this spot in the written accounts of this war (Gürkan, 1996; Kaba, 2018). Horoz Ali served as the guard at the Kyrenia Gate for many years during the Ottoman period and according to historical records he was the one to hand over the key of the gate to the British in 1878 before finally leaving his post (Kaba, 2018). It is reported that the gate was also called the *Edirne [Adrianople] Gate* in this period (<http://www.evka.org/site/sayfa.aspx?pkey=471>). **Barbaro Bastion:** The tombs of the three martyrs believed to fall in the Ottoman-Venetian wars are found in this bastion. In later years this space served as a cemetery. The Turkish name of the bastion, “Musalla” comes from the marble

slabs the dead were lain on in preparation for the memorial service (Kaba, 2018).

### 2.3. British Period 1878-1960

**Kyrenia Gate:** The photograph that was taken by the Mongolian brothers before 1931 according to Gürkan's account shows the Kyrenia Gate from inside the walls (Fig. 3). This photograph shows raised ramps on both sides of the gate, probably built to allow for the passage of vehicles as the gate was not high enough for that. The domed structure built by the Ottomans was already demolished to make room for the traffic in this photograph. According to Keshishian, a coach service to Nicosia was started in 1929, but since the busses were not able to pass under the arch of the Kyrenia gate its upper section was removed.

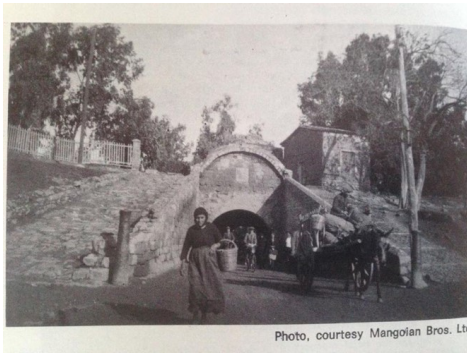


Fig. 3. Kyrenia Gate (Haşmet Gürkan, 1996).

The name Kyrenia Gate refers to the fact that the gate is situated on the road to Kyrenia. In 1931, the city walls on both sides of the Kyrenia Gate were cut to ease the intercity transportation in circumstances of increased vehicle traffic (Keshishian, 1972). Thanks to the passageways opened through both sides, Kyrenia Gate was isolated without losing its architectural merit and design value (Keshishian, 1978). According to Gürkan, after it was closed as a gate with no possibility to enter or exit, it provided shelter to the homeless for long years. He stated that the Kyrenia Gate remained as a small castle after it was opened. Another date on the door marks a restoration performed in 1931 (Gürkan, 1996). Cannons used by the British during this period

were placed in front of the gate facing the city walls (Kaba, 2018).

**Barbaro Bastion:** Bağışkan states that as a result of a series of discussions between 1955-1957 among the officials of the General Directorate of Trusts and Foundations, the Municipal Government of Nicosia, and the British Colonial Administration, the decision was made to shift the place of public festivities to the Barbaro (Musalla) Bastion, which was by then known as the İplikçiler Hisarı, the "Fortress of the Thread Makers." As it was considered a historical monument, the bastion was leased to the General Directorate of Trusts and Foundations for 99 years with an agreement signed on 01/03/1956. The British administration stipulated only temporary structures to be built on this land of 8 acres, 3 houses and 1100 square feet. In 1956, the municipal government of Nicosia reorganized the Barbaro Bastion as a place for public festivities (Bağışkan, 2011). Hikmetağalar accounted that the celebrations of religious holidays started to take place in the Barbaro Bastion between 1957-1958, which continued this way for about 4-5 years and then the celebrations moved to the outside of the walls (Hikmetağalar, 1996). **City walls:** In the 1915 Nicosia deed map, Gürkan stated that the empty space in the "Saman Bagcha" or the Samanbahçe (Hay Yard) with its current name was used as an animal market, but because of the row houses built on this area in the 1920s, the market was moved to the moat to the northeast of the Kyrenia Gate. According to Gürkan's account, there was an animal market here every Friday until 1958 (Gürkan, 1996). However, the Kyrenia Gate was unfortunately disconnected from the city walls with the construction of a road through the walls in 1931 with the aim of easing the vehicle traffic on both sides. In this period, the cut walls were reshaped and stairs were built on the inclined part close to the road to provide access in that direction. Information on the city walls of these years can be found in the memoirs about the İnönü Square located in front of the city walls in the southeast direction when entering the city through the Kyrenia Gate. Bağışkan's article, "Festivities of Nicosia from Past to Present" published in the Yenidüzen newspaper of dated

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 stated that the first location used for holiday celebrations was the Sarayönü Square, but it was later moved to the İnönü Square and this area was used as a second center of festivities in Nicosia between 1945-1956 (Bağışkan, 2011). In Gürkan's account the place for celebrations was Sarayönü until 1940 and was transferred to the Kyrenia Gate (İnönü Square) in 1940 to remain there until 1955 (Gürkan, 1996). Bağışkan provided information about the square for festivities and its surroundings, especially the section to the south of the square, as well as a photograph (Bağışkan, 2011) taken before the Ford Garage was built in 1947 or 1949 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. İnönü Square festivities (Tuncer Bağışkan, 2011).

We learn from Gürkan's account that there was a large orchard in the area where the garage was to be built and it was destroyed in 1946 for the construction (Gürkan, 1996). Accordingly, in these years an approximately 3-4 m extent of the city walls, close to the Kyrenia Gate was covered with stonework and the remaining part continued as an elevated earth structure. The section closer to the road was gradually elevated until it reached at the height of fortification and at that point it ended with a horizontal line of approximately 2 m width. Sevgi Atai, a resident of the Reşadiye Street close to the square wrote in her memoirs of those years that those "living on the side of the cut wall adjacent to the road would climb the wall with the help of a ladder with portable chairs they brought along to watch the festivities." This area unfortunately did not enter the frame in the existing photograph. In the pho-

tograph taken in front of the Kyrenia Gate, no boundary is seen between the city walls and the elevated earth structure to form part of the city wall. Moreover, the slope formed by the elevation from the Kyrenia Gate towards the Barbaro Bastion was apparently very close to the top level of the city walls. Bağışkan recalls that the festivities were held in the İnönü Square starting from around 1945, but later moved to the area in front of the inner city walls made of cut stone (Bağışkan, 2011).

As it is understood from the existing photograph, only a 3-4 m long part of the city walls passing through the middle part of the square was built by the British to reshape the earth structure using cut stones. This modification on the city walls probably took place between 1950 and 1956 and led to other restructuring or renovation activities in the surrounding environment. In the 1961 book *Kıbrıs (Cyprus)*, a collection of photographs by Kemal Rüstem from different parts of the island, there is only one photograph of the city walls, showing a small section between the Kyrenia Gate and Barbaro Bastion (Rüstem, 1961) (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Kyrenia Gate and city walls (Kemal Rüstem, 1961).

This is a very important source on the change that took place from the year 1950 to 1961. It shows that some work was made on 5 different levels of city walls, each at different heights and widths and facing the direction of the İsmet İnönü Square in the form of an amphitheater. Furthermore, the section facing the road and the square were completely paved as a smooth stone surface to form a slope towards the middle of the wall and the surrounding area was arranged as pedestrian walk. In the same photograph, a rec-

tangular chamber is observed on the wall façade with an opening facing the square.

#### 2.4. Turkish Period 1960-1975

Kyrenia Gate: On October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1963, a statue of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was erected on the north side of the Kyrenia Gate and this area was reserved for state ceremonies. Between the gate structure and the statue, two English-style cannons were placed alongside flag poles. According to Bozkurt, the chamber on the Kyrenia Gate was used as a post in the war between 1963-1974 and soldiers used it to watch the surrounding (Bozkurt, 2011). Barbaro Bastion: The Bastion was in use as the the 1st Infantry Regiment Command Headquarters when the military started to construct the Mücahitler Sitesi (Veterans Lodge) in March 1967 (<http://www.tbgocturk.com>). On October 29<sup>th</sup> 1973, the building was inaugurated as the Nicosia Sancak Headquarters. City wall: A photograph from 1961 taken by Kemal Rüstem shows that seating areas were arranged on the city walls at different levels.

#### 2.5. Turkish Federated State of Cyprus 1975-1983

Barbaro Bastion: On August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1982, the “National Struggle Museum” was opened on the same bastion (<http://www.eemd.gov.ct.tr/tr-tr/millim%C3%BCcadelem%C3%BCzesi.aspx>). In the eastern section, the fortification level was connected to the moat level by way of a staircase. City wall: In 1976, architect Mustafa Akıncı –and the current President– was elected as the mayor of Nicosia. After his inauguration, he launched a project involving important changes for the city walls in order to regulate the crowd of peddlers in the İnönü Square. He briefly mentioned this project in his book *Belediye Başkanlığı’nda 14 Yıl (14 Years as the Mayor)* published in February 2010: “İnönü Square was filled with street vendors. In 1976, a resolution was passed to build 9 kiosks there. Its completion extended till the year 1977, but it was decided on in 1976” (Akıncı, 2010). The mentioned project was researched in the archives of the Municipal Government of Nicosia, but could not be identified.

#### 2.6. TRNC Period since 1983

Kyrenia Gate: For a brief period, the structure was used as a Tourism Information Office and a small gallery where the pictures of Horoz Ali, the last Ottoman guard were exhibited. ([https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/girne\\_kap%C4%b1s%C4%b1](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/girne_kap%C4%b1s%C4%b1)). However, this structure is not in use today. In the İnönü Square to the southeast of the gate, a statue of Dr. Fazıl Küçük, a former Vice President of the Republic of Cyprus was erected on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1989 (<http://docs.neu.edu.tr/library/6539381679.pdf>). Probably, this area also underwent some reorganization with the erection of the statue and took its current form. On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Kyrenia Gate was renovated (<https://www.voiceoftheisland.com/girne-kapisi-date-sari-taslaricekiciler-parcalaniyor/104530/>). The news article dated 23/01/2019 stated that the walls of Nicosia would be restored and cleaned in two phases. The second phase to start in October 2019 was planned to include the Flatro Bastion located to the west of the Kyrenia Gate (<https://haberkibris.com/lefkosa-surlarinda-restorasyon-icin-calisma-basladi-2019-01-23.html>) Fortification wall: Approximate dimensions of this area were determined with the help of the photographs taken from the fortification walls between the Barbaro Bastion and the Kyrenia Gate. Accordingly, the height of the city wall was approximately 4,10 m from the moat side, while it dropped to 3,30 m near the Kyrenia Gate. The section close to the Barbaro Bastion was 2,45 m high. Therefore, it can be said that the existing slope was about 1 m. The tunnel opened in the British Period for general public needs when the fortification wall was arranged from the point close to the Barbaro Bastion from the moat section was measured approximately 4 m. The floor of the moat area was approximately 160-180 cm below the ground reached from the passageway between the walls. In the section on the moat side still used as a park (the Veterans Park), the walls of the fortification are covered with weeds and fell into misuse and neglect from place to place. In this section, it can be said that the walls are severely worn down. Close to the Kyrenia Gate, there is a space separated with an iron gate and opening into the city walls. The stones of different colors in this section of the

walls bear witness to construction or renovation efforts from different time periods. To the east of the room is a wall of approximately 2 m x 2 m x 50 cm adjacent to the fortification wall, which is presumably built in the modern times possibly to house service equipment, cables, etc. The 9 small shops built inside the city wall in 1977 are still in use today. The sidewalk in front of these shops was widened to provide more space for landscaping on the side of the one-way traffic. The shops can use the wider sidewalk to place tables and umbrellas in order to serve more customers. A total of 3 staircases were built to reach the walls, two of which are on both sides of these 9 shops and one close to the public restrooms. These stairs possibly also lead to the 5 rows of seats built in different elevations as seen in the photograph dated 1961, but are now covered with weed and grass. Between the shops and the Kyrenia Gate, there is also a 1,5 m high structure designed as a water reservoir. There are probably water tanks and chimneys on the shops to meet the water demand in this area. There are also two high palm trees on the city walls. The gates with iron bars in front of the stairways leading up to the walls were probably built to control the exit. Seats on different levels on both sides of the shops disappear towards the Musalla Bastion and public restrooms due to the difference in level. In the section where the public restrooms are a plastic water tank is seen on the wall, as well as a white metal panel inside made to conceal the mechanical elements. There is another shop built into the city walls from the restrooms towards the Musalla Bastion. This shop has a larger façade compared to others. There is also a white plastic water tank on this shop. Again, a water tank about 1.5 m in height was built on the concrete wall leading to the Musalla Bastion.

### 3. Conclusion and Evaluation

This study investigated the historical changes that took place in the Kyrenia Gate, Barbaro Bastion, and the city walls together with their surrounding area with the help of photographs and memoirs obtained after long and arduous searching. In the process, important information was uncovered, especially from the Ottoman and British periods. According to this, it was found that in 1931, the domed chamber on the Kyrenia Gate was demolished and ramps were built on both sides of the arched passage with a view to relieving the traffic congestion, but by doing so, the connection to the city was cut off on both sides of the Kyrenia Gate. However, it can be said that especially from 1931, this indeed relieved the traffic both inside and outside the walls. During this period, the section of the walls facing the city were apparently left as nothing but a pile of soil and this passage was covered with cut stone in places. Photographs and memoirs at hand suggest that the boundary of the wall was defined during the British Period between 1950 and 1956. During this effort, possibly also a passage or tunnel was opened from the moat to the inner wall, approximately at the midpoint of the walls and a restroom was built in this passage. It is evident that the seating arrangement at 5 different levels on the walls was made with the festivities in the İnönü Square in mind. The city walls, which are used extensively since they are in the immediate vicinity of the entrance point, took their current form with the construction of 9 small shops (kiosks) in 1977 as part of a project to regulate the peddlers in the area. The site was re-arranged with the statue of Dr. Fazıl Küçük erected in the square probably in 1989. The existing environment was reorganized with the small statue. As for the current situation, with the weeds and grass growing between the stones, with trees neglected and stones falling apart, an urgent action is in order to protect and restore this invaluable historical heritage.

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