



**The 13 Martyrs of Kantara:
Defenders of Leavened Bread In the Eucharist**

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To the west of the Castle of Kantara in the province of Kyrenia on Cyprus, there is the Monastery of Panagia Kantariotissa, which was built in the 12th century and renovated by Archbishop Chrysanthos of Cyprus in 1777. In 1783 the iconostasis of the monastery's church was made gold and was decorated with icons.

In the early 13th century a group of thirteen monks who came from Mount Athos settled in the monastery and revived the ascetic way of life and Orthodox tradition on the island, which infuriated the Frankish rulers of Cyprus, and notably the Latin Church.

During the Frankish Period, the Latin Church, through its representatives in Cyprus, had made great persecutions against the Orthodox. The Orthodox Church of Cyprus has managed to survive only through constant struggle, with continued resistance and with many great sacrifices. The most striking Orthodox resistance against the Latins, is the suffering of the thirteen monks of the monastery of Panagia at Kantara. Their deaths, after horrific torture, took place on May 19, 1231 and it is on May 19th that the Orthodox Church honors their memory, because they have been declared saints.

The thirteen monks/saints were:

1. John (Abbot) 2. Conon 3. Jeremiah 4. Mark 5. Cyril 6. Theoktistos 7. Barnabas 8. Maximus 9. Theognostus 10. Joseph 11. Gennadius 12. Gerasimos 13. Germanos

As saints, they are unknown to the Cypriot chronographers. Details, however, about them and their suffering are found in a relevant text Titled "Diigisis: The thirteen Saints and Fathers who were killed through burning by the Latins in the island of Cyprus in the year 1231." The text "Diigisis" survived in two manuscripts of the 14th century - one (located at the National Library in Paris) written in 1426 and the second (No. 575 at the Marciana Library in Venice) manuscript was published originally by K. Sathas [*Medieval Library*, Volume B, Venice, 1873, pages.20-39].

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From the manuscripts we derive the following information:

Two monks named John and Conon arrived in Cyprus in 1228 from a monastery in Pamphyla, Asia Minor. They settled at the Monastery of Panagia Kantariotissa, but all was not peaceful for the Orthodox in Cyprus.

The first conflict with the Latin clergy of Cyprus must have happened in 1228. It was during a time when the persecution of the Orthodox by the Latins in Cyprus was on the rise. The Latin Church on the island was informed about the great reputation of the monks of Kantara, and had sent a representative to the monastery named Andreas to inquire about the monks who were there.

The latter was welcomed and hosted and initially the entire conversation had a friendly tone, until they started to talk about the issue of using unleavened bread in communion, an issue

which had caused much controversy between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Churches (the azymite controversy). The monks of Kantara confessed that during their Orthodox ritual they used leavened bread in accordance with tradition.

The dispute over the use or not of unleavened bread during the mystery of the Eucharist had arisen because the Latins believed that the Last Supper had happened during the day of unleavened bread, as evidenced by the Evangelist Luke. The Orthodox on the other hand supported that the Jews called "the day of the unleavened bread" the period between sunset on Good Thursday until sunset on Good Friday. And it was named so, not because during that time they ate unleavened bread, but because they prepared it. Therefore, since the Last Supper took place during the evening of Holy Thursday, Christ must have used bread made with yeast, and not bread without yeast, because the latter had not yet been prepared since its use was on Good Friday.

The big difference then, between the Orthodox and Latins was highlighted with an acute manner during the discussion between the Latin Andreas and the monks of Kantara, with the former leaving very angry from the monastery.

As the "Diigisis" records, the monks of Kantara had even suggested a process to establish which was the correct view about the use of unleavened bread. After both conducted the Liturgy, with them (using leavened bread) and the Latins (using unleavened), a representative of each faith had to fall in the fire to prove that the one of the two who advocated the truth would not burn! This suggestion was not accepted, and the monks were ordered to appear before the Latin archbishop of Nicosia to answer.

After an overnight vigil in their monastery, the thirteen monks began their journey to Nicosia the next day singing the 119th Psalm. In the monastery of Saint George of Mangana (or Saint George Lamportos) in Nicosia, where they arrived, Orthodox crowds flocked to see the monks of Kantara.

Then the monks came before the Latin archbishop who was called Efstorgios, and who was surrounded by a large number of Latin clergy. Efstorgios questioned them, and the monks with frankness argued also before him about the Orthodox view of the use of leavened bread. Then the Latin archbishop jailed them after earlier humiliating them through torture.

In prison, the monks remained, in accordance with the text "Diigisis", for three years, enduring much suffering. From the suffering in prison, one of them, Theognostus (Theodoretus), died. His body was burned by the Latins (April 5, 1231). During the period of imprisonment, the monks were interrogated and tortured again and again, but the attempts to make them renounce their views about the use of leavened bread failed.

Finally, by order of the Pope, the monks were treated as heretics, which for them it meant torture and execution. Among other tortures they suffered, as it is reported in the text "Diigisis", they were also tied behind horses which dragged them along the river bed of the River Pidias which then passed through Nicosia (between Paphos Gate and the Gate of Famagusta). Finally, half dead, the monks were thrown and burned at the stake (May 19, 1231).



This terrible crime of the Latins caused great reaction both in Cyprus itself and outside it, and the Patriarch of Constantinople Germanos sent a letter addressed to Pope Gregory IX, and in his letter, among other things, he asked: "Well, Your Holiness, Beatitude and Apostle Peter's successor. Is this what a meek and humble of heart disciple of Christ orders to happen to monks?"

Also, Germanos wrote to Pope Gregory that the suffering and death of the monks of Kantara was the last event needed to complete the course of war between the two Churches. The King of Cyprus Henry I was also involved in the crime because he had been forced by the Latin priests to order the torture and killing of the monks. This is because the Latin churchmen felt that they, themselves as priests, could not provide such a mandate!

The monastery of Panagia Kantariotissa continued its existence after the tragedy of the thirteen monks, and its final dissolution happened in the late 19th, or early 20th century. Today only the church of the monastery is preserved which is in a very advanced stage of deterioration because of the looting it suffered by the Turkish invaders after 1974, and by not been maintained.

Source: <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/05/13-martyrs-of-kantara-defenders-of.html>



The remains of Panagia Kantariotissa church