

'Imports' from Istanbul: Ottoman Exiles to Famagusta and Their Tombs

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As is well known, Cyprus became a favourite place of exile in the Ottoman period, with Famagusta in particular playing host to many prominent individuals who had fallen foul of the sultan. While the city's most famous monument to this phenomenon is the prison of the nineteenth-century author Namık Kemal, far more interesting are two carved marble tombs that stand beside the Gothic church of SS Peter and Paul, converted by the Ottomans into the mosque of Sinan Pasha. These fine Ottoman memorials – one a full sarcophagus, the other a headstone – mark the graves of two high-ranking individuals banished to the island in the wake of Sultan Ahmed III's dethronement in 1730: Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi (d. 1731), famous as the first Ottoman ambassador to France; and Veli-Efendizade Mehmed Emin Efendi (d. 1734–35), formerly Chief Clerk of the Janissaries. Like the individuals they commemorate, both memorials are alien to the island, due to having been transferred from the Ottoman capital and conforming in every way to the tastes of the metropolis. Indeed, they are among the earliest examples of a tradition that would last until the end of the nineteenth century, whereby elite Ottomans sent to Cyprus either as officials or exiles would have their tombstones imported from Istanbul. This practice, whose only record is the tombs themselves, was highly unusual in the broader Ottoman context, and bespeaks Cyprus's special position as a locus of high-ranking exiles, who were anxious – even in death – to distinguish themselves in their new provincial circumstances.