WHEN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY MEETS CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT:
A VIRTUAL TOUR OF THE EPISCOPAL BASILICA OF KOURION IN CYPRUS

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The dissertation concentrates on how a virtual tour application involving mobile devices can be used for the presentation of cultural heritage places to the wider public under the scope of proper Cultural Heritage Management (CHM). The ultimate goal is to highlight the potential of adapting such applications for as many cultural heritage places of Cyprus as possible. To illustrate these ideas, the thesis proposes and develops a model of virtual tour application. The episcopal basilica of Kourion which is a well-known and well-published monument was used as a case-study.

To accomplish the thesis's objectives, research of existing studies on the topic under investigation was conducted. Bibliographical research and research of the mobile market stores were also undertaken as to form a general idea on how such application should be. In order to be able to create the application of the episcopal basilica of Kourion, bibliographical research was also conducted to collect the information incorporated in the application. Author's personal study at the basilica site was also necessary to identify basic issues related to the current accessibility and presentation of the basilica in order to strengthen the argument in favour of a virtual tour application for the specific monument. Furthermore, photographs of the monument were taken to accompany the texts in the application and create a panorama of it. Some of the movable findings of the basilica housed at the museum of Episkopi were also photographed in order to link them with the monument in the application. After collecting all the data needed for the application, the actual development of it took place.

In the first part, the thesis provides a theoretical framework. It discusses the power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in the field of CHM. It also presents some principles on digital visualization of cultural heritage according to international instruments while it also gives some definitions of the term "virtual tour". The thesis then examines advantages and disadvantages of virtual tour applications for the field of CHM, especially for the presentation of archaeological sites and monuments. It also presents successful and unsuccessful examples of such applications and defines what features makes such application successful. Furthermore, it examines if there are examples of virtual tour applications of Cypriot archaeological sites. In a second stage, the dissertation concentrates on the case-study by providing the reasons behind the creation of a virtual tour application for the episcopal basilica of Kourion, while the current presentation and accessibility of the basilica are discussed. It then presents all the aspects taken into account for the actual realization of the application. More specifically, a reference to the bibliographical research is made and the content of the application is presented (texts and

visual aids) while it also discusses the technical aspects of the application model as well as its workflow.

As a result of this research and with the permission of the Director of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus, a model of virtual tour application that provides access to full scientific information to the broad public was developed. Using this application, visitors of the episcopal basilica could enjoy a complete tourist guide, rich of textual (i.e. descriptions, links to more information and related articles, etc.) and visual information (i.e. maps, ground plans, aerial photograph, panorama, 3D model, etc.) directly on their personal devices, like smart-phones.

The thesis concludes that it is necessary to revise in a more effective way the cultural heritage presentation and deal with new techniques. In this context, a virtual tour application could be a useful and effective tool to present cultural heritage and disseminate information on it. The application model presented in the thesis could be used as a basis for the creation of further applications for other Cypriot cultural heritage places.