

Aspects and Refractions of the Cypriot 1821
- Faces, Sketches and Shadows
[Πτυχές και Διαθλάσεις του Κυπριακού 1821
- Πρόσωπα, Σχέδια και Σκιές]

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Petros Papapolyviou's work *Πτυχές και Διαθλάσεις του Κυπριακού 1821* offers a meticulous examination of archival material, demonstrating both rigorous scholarship and an impressive attention to detail. Through careful exploration of every available scrap of documented evidence, Papapolyviou raises fundamental questions about familiar interpretive issues, exhibits philosophical reflections, and analyses historical phenomena. His idea of history follows the pattern of *longue durée*, questioning stereotypical historicist, closely context-oriented paradigms, and renders a structurally and intuitively unique contribution to Cypriological studies within a territory previously unexplored.

Papapolyviou traces the development of Cypriot irredentist visions, noting their evolution into one of the longest-standing historical trajectories in modern Greek history. Two key aspects of collective consciousness are addressed: the first relates to the subject of Cypriot history itself, which remains largely unappealing in modern Greek historiography, even 200 years after the Greek Revolution of 1821. As Papapolyviou observes, narrow, centralised perspectives in Greece often overshadow the revolutionary contributions of relatively smaller regions, such as Cyprus, that ultimately remained outside the Greek state. The second aspect concerns the trend within Cypriot historiography that frames the island's inhabitants as 'Ottoman Cypriots', suggesting a process of Hellenisation only beginning in the late 19th century. This issue, rooted in the deconstructive sociology of nationalism, has indeed shaped discussions in the past three decades. Papapolyviou's analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of Cypriot history as part of broader socio-political and cultural movements.

Furthermore, Papapolyviou invites reflection on broader questions of historical experience and its representation. History emerges as a rich journey into the past,

enriching perspectives and revealing a complex network of events, actions, progressions, manifold sufferings, and ideological and moral tensions. Over time, ideas and actions are transformed into remnants of history. These remnants, mere fragments of the past, leave traces that scholars and historians must meticulously reconstruct and interpret. Monuments, ruins, texts and manuscripts evoke a range of emotions, from sorrow to wonder, but they also prompt contemplation on humanity's enduring struggle toward fundamental ideals such as liberty and autonomy. The central thread running through history is precisely the pursuit of a universal purpose, often manifesting as the quest for freedom, which reappears consistently across various historical periods and is revitalised through sacrifice and perseverance.

The historiographical process, as illustrated in Papapolyviou's work, is not merely a collection of facts, but an intellectual and imaginative reconstruction of the past. History is viewed not as a static account, but as a dynamic dialogue between the past and the present (between the living and the dead). Ideas and experiences from previous centuries continue to inspire and inform, creating a dialogue that spans across time. This view aligns with Papapolyviou's method, which involves a deep engagement with historical figures, bringing them to life within contemporary discussions while ensuring that they remain rooted in their historical context.

Papapolyviou's discussion of the 'Cypriot problem of 1821' reveals how insufficiently explored this topic has been within historiographical discourse. The inclusion of Philios Zannetos, a figure of major significance in the third part of the book, emphasises the importance of this overlooked aspect of historical evolution. Zannetos, commissioned by the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus in 1922 (a century after the Greek Revolution) to compile a special edition about Cyprus (*Κυπριακόν Δεύκωμα*), highlights the contributions of the island in the struggle for national independence. Papapolyviou presents Zannetos as a figure who contributes to a historical dialogue that transcends time. Zannetos' work, *Cyprus During the Century of Regeneration: 1821–1930*, published in 1930, provides insights into the sacrifices made by Cyprus over a century, forming a symbolic continuity with Papapolyviou's research in 2022.

The research conducted by Papapolyviou into the events of the 'Cypriot 1821' is a thorough investigation, offering more than a mere summary of past efforts. The analysis moves beyond a superficial reading of historical struggles, instead placing these efforts within the broader context of individual and collective aspirations. Papapolyviou not only revitalises historical actors, but also projects their struggles into future

considerations, ensuring that history remains an active, intellectual endeavour rather than a fossilised relic of the past.

Key Themes

Influence of the Enlightenment

Papapolyviou's work illustrates the profound impact of Enlightenment ideals on Cypriot intellectual circles in the early 19th century. This influence appears in various letters, declarations, and memoranda, notably in the two letters (signed 'Cyprus, Κύπρος') that Frangoudes delivered to Ioannis Capodistrias in 1828. These letters reflect core Enlightenment concepts, such as natural rights, freedom, rationality, and the idea of societal progress toward happiness. Educated Cypriots embraced these ideals during a transitional period marked by the unification of dispersed states into nation-states. This challenges the misconception, often propagated under British colonial rule, that Cypriots were primitive people isolated on a barren island. Instead, they actively participated in a dynamic intellectual movement shaping European political thought.

Internal Divisions and Discord

A recurring theme in Cypriot history is the pattern of internal divisions, conflicts, and disputes among Cypriots, whether exiles, fugitives, or residents of the island, including discords within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Papapolyviou's analysis reveals that these divisions, though often portrayed as signs of discord, were in fact inevitable and at times essential to the fabric of historical understanding. Historical experience shows that the synthesis of ideas through dialogue, however contentious, has always been a foundational element of political and social development. While these exchanges may not have mirrored modern democratic pluralism, they played a critical role in shaping political consciousness and rational decision-making in a fragmented society.

Capodistrias and the 'Great Idea'

Ioannis Capodistrias, Greece's first Governor, emerges as a central figure in Papapolyviou's exploration of the Cypriot irredentist vision. Capodistrias' correspondence with the British Secretary of State for War and Colonies reveals his sophisticated diplomatic thinking and steadfast commitment to expanding the Greek nation. Citing ancient geographer Strabo, Capodistrias argued that the historical boundaries of Greece, obscured by four centuries of foreign domination, were restored during the Greek War of Independence. As Papapolyviou notes, Capodistrias was the first Greek leader to explicitly include the Greeks of Cyprus within the envisioned Greek state

boundaries. His assertion positioned Cyprus as part of Greece's rightful territory, a bold stance that remained unparalleled in international diplomacy for decades.

Charalambos Malis and the Human Condition

In Part B of his book, 'Human Traces', Papapolyviou sheds light on the largely forgotten figure of Charalambos Malis, regarded as one of the most distinguished Cypriot fighters in the Greek Revolution. Despite his significance, little is known about Malis today, either in Cyprus or Greece, and the year and place of his death remain undocumented. Papapolyviou reproduces Malis' essay 'Characters or On the Unspeakable', published in *Athena*, in Nafplio in 1832. The essay critiques political opportunism and moral decay, with Machiavellian undertones. Malis' depiction of the 'uncharacteristic' politician -one who shifts allegiances and deceives both friends and foes- exposes the darker aspects of political life. The essay's philosophical depth, drawing on ancient Greek, Renaissance, and theological thought, underscores Malis' intellectual sophistication.

Eschatological Perspective and Cypriot Destiny

Papapolyviou's exploration of Cypriot history culminates in a reflection on the eschatological hope of union with Greece, a vision that once seemed to transcend historical constraints. However, historical reality has often revealed such aspirations to be utopian. The only certainty in history, as Papapolyviou presents it, is the human condition: people who struggle, act, and endure suffering. A letter from Kyprianos Theseus to the elders of Hydra, dated 5 October 1821, encapsulates this struggle, urging fellow Greeks to liberate their compatriots in Cyprus (p. 46). Despite being marginalised by the newly established Greek state, which prioritised other regions, Cypriots faced immense hardship in their participation in the struggle for Greek independence. Papapolyviou meticulously documents the contributions of hundreds of Cypriots who joined the revolutionary cause, raising the question of how many more remain unrecorded in history. This reflection on Cypriot sacrifices highlights the deeper complexities of historical remembrance.

Conclusion

Two centuries after the Greek Revolution, Cypriots remain divided over questions of national identity, their ancestors' contributions to the revolutionary struggle, and the broader meaning of historical consciousness. This division reflects deeper socio-political realities shaped by longstanding misunderstandings and ideological rigidity. Papapolyviou's work challenges simplistic narratives, urging a more nuanced

understanding of the evolution of ideas. Historians, like archaeologists, must delve into the layers of the past to uncover unfulfilled expectations and significant, hidden complexities. The Greek identity of Cypriots, their alignment with irredentist visions, and their cultural and religious traditions were not postcolonial constructs, but were rooted in deep historical processes.

The revolutionary upheavals of the late 18th and early 19th centuries produced independent states free from imperial rule. While these movements were not exclusively nationalistic, they left indelible marks on historical consciousness. The sacrifices of the Cypriots, notably the massacres of July 9, illustrate the tangible and painful realities of this historical period. Papapolyviou's meticulous work provides a sequence of historical events, offering valuable insights into the persistence of deferred hopes and expectations.

A recurring intellectual challenge lies in interpreting the past through a contemporary lens. This anachronistic perspective often leads to misinterpretations or overly modernised historical narratives. To truly understand history, the past must be approached from the vantage point of its own time, not through contemporary conceptual frameworks. Attempts to reshape historical narratives in light of present-day concerns can lead to distortions unless grounded in the chronology and development of historical facts.

Papapolyviou's work stands as a significant contribution to the study of Cypriot history, marked by a dedication and scholarship that reflect both intellectual rigour and a commitment to historical accuracy. His approach to history as a living memory invites further research and reflection on the historical trajectories that continue to shape the modern Cypriot identity.

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