

Colonial Cyprus 1878-1960 *Selected Readings*

Edited by EMILIOS SOLOMOU AND HUBERT FAUSTMANN
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One might ask why it was worth republishing this selection of articles taken from issues of *The Cyprus Review* published over the last twenty years. There are good reasons. *The Cyprus Review* has a much broader focus, concentrating heavily on current Cyprus issues. This volume seeks to highlight the existence of a series specifically on colonial Cyprus. Most of these articles avoid particular events. Rather they draw our attention to the social and political framework in which these events unfold. The point is not to provide an *alternative* to the established authorities on this period – and we are lucky enough to have several – but to compliment and enrich them. The articles in this book, on the whole, do exactly that. Of course, any compilation of this kind is bound to present varying standards of sophistication in the analyses presented. But they all have something to contribute.

The book is arranged chronologically which is a logical sequence if one is reading the book from cover to cover, but if we look at them thematically, we see that the articles offer information on aspects of colonial history that are often ancillary to a mainstream analysis, but which clarify, embellish and sometimes raise questions about those main themes. It begins with a masterly summary of the Eastern Question by Victor Papacosmas. This puts the history of colonial Cyprus firmly within its international context. ‘The Eastern Question is a fact’, wrote Britain’s famous minister to the Porte, Stratford De Radcliffe, in a letter to *The Times* in 1875, and cited in the Papacosmas article, ‘a reality of infinite duration’. Thus the developments in colonial Cyprus are put in a context that makes them comprehensible – a context that is revisited in some of the articles covering the final years 1958-1960. At that time there was a new uncertainty as to the island’s future in an area once more engulfed in ripples of regional tension. These tensions affected the nature of the settlement reached.

This interaction between internal Cypriot and regional developments reappears in the very interesting articles by Heinz Richter and Yiorghos Leventis on the relations between AKEL and international communism. In Yiorghos Leventis’ penetrating look at exactly what happened in 1948, we see the AKEL leaders seeking guidance from Andreas Zachariades, the communist leader in Greece then torn apart by civil war. What course was AKEL to take after the breakdown in negotiations at the consultative assembly for a new constitution for the island? That the surprised Cypriots obeyed in such a submissive way, Zacharias’ somewhat off-hand order to change

course from gradualism to obstructionism, throws an interesting light on the mechanics of international socialism. But one wonders if there actually was any choice? Once the church and the politicians of the right had walked out on the consultative assembly, could the left have avoided a struggle for immediate *enosis* and retained its constituency? It would have been a huge risk to take. There are internal dynamics at work here too.

The dynamics of internal politics and their relation to the changing patterns of patronage, as the island moved into modern gear, crop up in several articles. This changing framework is clearly set out by Hubert Faustmann in his article on clientelism. Many of the articles refer to that most potent form of obligation created by money lending – form of investment indulged in at many levels, even by members of the legislative council.

The legislative council, the body that was at the heart of the island's politics for the first fifty or so years of British rule is referred to in several articles. There is much more to be written on this subject. A closer look at the council's minutes and colonial correspondence during the early years of British rule would put paid to the perception of this forum which comes across most strongly in this book. Was it simply a toy parliament – a divide and rule tool? – Far from it. The political manoeuvrings of the legislative council – with its constituents, with the colonial government, with the archbishop, with the Cadis and Efkar – were far more complicated.

There is a very informative, if somewhat judgemental article, by Michael Michaelides on Turkish Cypriots and the labour movement. It is clear from this and other articles of Jeanette Choisi and Stefanos Papageorgiou, how economic and social interests *transcended* the religious and nationalist divide throughout colonial rule. And many new details come to light. It had not occurred to me, for example – but it must have been so – what a large number of Turkish Cypriot farmers were in debt to Greek Cypriot money lenders. Also, that although the cooperative movement (like the trade union movement) was a high point of cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots to their mutual economic interest, there were from as far back as 1948 a growing number of separate Turkish Cypriot cooperatives (113 in 1946 to 148 in 1956). Perhaps this was natural since the cooperatives were village institutions, encouraged by the British, to by-pass the money lenders, and we are reminded by Jan Asmussen that there was an escalating decrease in the number of mixed villages in the island. There has, it seems, been much discussion as to the causes of the disappearance of 94 of the over 300 mixed villages between 1891 and 1931. There is a lot of scope for further study on this kind of subject. Have there been such studies? What are the results? Which community remained in the village in each case?

The causes of migration at that point would have been largely socio-economic and do not necessarily indicate a widening gap between the communities. Likewise, regarding intercommunal life and strife, apart from easily pinpointed periods when strife related to internal and external political tensions, attacks on individuals tended to be examples of common crime or disputes that had more to do with the ownership of land, animals, or even women. This was certainly true in Crete at the turn of the century. Looking beyond the narrow limits of this island

is a necessary part of seeking to understand developments within it. The broader regional context of internal developments is not, on the whole, explored by the authors of this collection of articles.

This is especially true of the many articles in the book that touch on the evolution of Greek and Turkish nationalism in Cyprus. Hakan Yanuz places the beginning of nationalist trends well before British rule. He associates it with the modernising effect on the Ottoman Empire of the Tanzimat reforms in the mid nineteenth century. All discuss how, when and why education came to be bound up with the growth of Greek and Turkish nationalism. Let me just make a comment on the currently fashionable references to a hypothetical common Cypriot nationalism, the growth of which, according to Jeanette Choisi the British Government 'was so afraid of'.

It is sometimes assumed that Cypriot *autonomy* as a target for the future would have had more chance of allowing Turkish Cypriot collaboration than the chronic campaign for union with Greece. *Enosis* clearly left the Turkish Cypriots out in the cold. The fact is that autonomy was *not* an acceptable alternative to *enosis* – probably not for the Turkish Cypriots and certainly not for Turkey. Jeanette Choisi quotes the Turkish Cypriot slogans used during the huge rally against the referendum for *enosis* conducted by the Greek Cypriot community in 1950. The two slogans were 'Enosis means death' but also 'autonomy means enslavement'. She tends to ignore the latter. The fear that majority rule just as much as *enosis* would lead to the disappearance of the Turkish Cypriot community as a separate political force is longstanding and certainly not a British invention. Although the conclusion is not drawn, from the developments described in these articles, it is clear that there could be no common Cypriot target for the future of the island and without a common target for the future there could not be a common nationalism. Greek Cypriot majority rule was fought just as strongly as *enosis* right through from the 1950s up to 1974. Ironically, it is only now that federation is acknowledged as the only possible way forward, that there is the possibility of a common Cypriot target.

Regarding perceptions of the Greekness of the Greek Cypriots – another fashionable subject touched on in this book: perceptions change with circumstances. It has been suggested recently, and is echoed in some of these articles, that the Greekness of Cypriots was somehow British inspired. We only have to get away from the insular approach, to see that that could not have been so. Indeed the Greekness of Cypriots was a perception the British were busily trying to undo in the 1930s. They wanted to replace it with a Cypriot or even British consciousness. They were trying, in fact, to take a leaf out of Italian policy in the Dodecanese (which incidentally failed dismally). The tone in these articles in this book is simply reflecting a general trend. Analysts tackling the thorny but central issue of nationalism and identity tend not to look beyond Cyprus – to behave as though the island existed in a political vacuum. Far from it, the growth of nationalisms in the eastern Mediterranean have rarely respected any borders real or imaginary.

By the end of World War II, the British knew that only by accommodating a Hellenic Identity could they keep the lid on Cyprus. The problem was – how to separate this perception from the aspiration for union with Greece. This is spelt out clearly by George Kelling in his

interesting article on 'Cyprus and the Official Mind of Imperialism in the Post-war World'. Initial inclinations within the Foreign Office to cede the island to Greece, are overtaken by ideas as to how to cope with 'Hellenic Identity' in an island which was to be considered a British 'fortress' colony and therefore not to be allowed the luxury of self determination.

By the 1950s, new nationalist stirrings in the Middle East, and particularly in Egypt, were to bring Turkey back into the centre of the strategic arena. These developments involved the island in a cold war version of the Eastern Question.

Another central factor in the British decision-making process regarding Cyprus – and this is touched on in Andrekos Varnava's article – was the acute sensitivity, the handling of Egyptian nationalism had created in the Prime Minister Antony Eden's relations with the strongly imperialist right wing of the Conservative party. His successor Harold Macmillan inherited this sensitivity which affected British decision making on Cyprus right up until 1960. In fact domestic politics within the island as well as the domestic politics of Britain, Turkey and Greece tended to impinge negatively on developments beyond the declaration of Cypriot Independence. The turmoil within the Conservative party over Rhodesia would have a desultory effect on British actions, but even more on Britain's failure to act soon enough on Cyprus in 1963. But that is a story beyond the time frame of this very worthwhile volume.

DIANA MARKIDES