

# **Britain in Cyprus Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878-2006**

**Edited by Hubert Faustmann and Nicos Peristianis  
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This book constitutes a remarkable contribution to the study of the history of Cyprus during the period of British rule (1878-1960), and beyond. As such its appearance is an important publishing event for at least two reasons. First, it contains 35 papers of good or high standard, which cover many aspects of the relations between British colonial power and the people of Cyprus. Second, the book's contents provide evidence that the intellectual culture of Cyprus has reached a significant point of maturity and self-consciousness. Roughly, half of the essays are written by Cypriot authors and some others by non-Cypriots who are working in various academic institutions in the northern and southern areas of Cyprus; and this indicates that there is now, in the country, a small professional community of scholars of history, social and political science, and international relations who employ their abilities and energies to study the historical development, political and economic character, and a variety of issues of Cypriot society in accordance with the established canons of their disciplines. Older Cypriot scholars most probably gained their initial interest in Cypriot history and politics by reading material of low scholarly value at school and in newspapers and journals, which was often designed to serve narrow political purposes. Irrespective of whether one judges the information or analysis contained in this or that essay convincing, nobody will find any of the essays to be other than works of serious scholarship, based on the proper use of historical sources, and aimed at discovering and presenting, in Ranke's famous phrase, "what actually happened".

The essay topics in this volume can be roughly grouped under the following themes:

## **Early Colonial Period, 1878 – 1931**

This group includes good essays by Heinz Richter, Diana Markides and Andrekos Varnava on the general subject of British strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which motivated Britain to secure an agreement with the Ottoman government to take over the

administration of Cyprus in exchange of protection for the Ottoman Empire. The 'big picture', long established by C.W.J. Orr and George Hill, is enriched by little known details about the British micro-politics and micro-diplomacy in response to changing power relations in the Mediterranean region before, during and after World War I. The image of Britain which pervades these and several other essays is that of a cunning imperial lion roaming the jungle of international society driven by its desire to expand its power and territory and secure its material interests with scant regard for the rights of small or weak creatures.

Marios Constantinou offers an interesting discussion – interesting when it is not obscured by abstruse theoretical terminology – intended, as he puts it, “to rethink Weber’s sociology of domination in terms of charismatic stratification, conflict and change against the background of Cyprus’ transition from Ottoman province to British colony”. This and some other essays present versions of the view that the process of secularisation, which was part and parcel of British administrative and economic reforms, created for the population a new set of values – modernisation, education, health and a better standard of life – which the Church could only combat by appeal to the monolithic aim of enosis. This aim, or talk about this aim, inevitably set the Greek-Cypriot nationalistic bourgeoisie not only against the colonial government, but against the Turkish-Cypriot bourgeoisie.

Rebecca Bryant focuses on the development of literacy within the Greek and Turkish communities of Cyprus in the early part of the twentieth century – another theme familiar to historians of Cyprus – and she traces its expression in the use of the print media, and in relations between (a) the two ethnic communities and (b) each of the communities and the colonial bureaucracy. Some aspects of the preceding themes are developed by Dimitra Karoulla-Vrikki who emphasises the link between language and ethnicity. This remarkable essay makes skilful use of primary sources from the period, especially correspondence between leading members of the two communities and the colonial government, which are interestingly kept (as I believe) in the little used Cyprus State Archives.

Hansjoerg Brey writes about the Cypriot economy under British rule and with special reference to the mining industry and the benefits which the cooperative movement bestowed on the rural – predominantly agricultural – population of the island. The author struggles honourably to collate, organise and make sense of badly incomplete economic data. A comprehensive and serious economic history of Cyprus remains to be written, but this will only be possible if and when the economic and financial documents of the British administration are made available to students of history.

### **Middle Colonial Period, 1931 – 1945**

Heinz Richter re-enters the collection to offer a review of political developments in the period starting with the march of Greek-Cypriot demonstrators on Government House on 21 October 1931, leading to a period of illiberal rule, and the end of World War II, when the Attlee government began to consider more liberal governmental arrangements for the people of the island. Given that the 'October events' and their aftermath are well documented, a reader may have expected a more detailed treatment of the character and underlying causes of the first explosion of collective Greek-Cypriot anger at colonial power, as well as the tyrannical and blunt reaction of the latter. That period created standards of behaviour for the two sides (for example, unwillingness to talk and negotiate with the other side, violence and suppression) which were to be developed and applied in 1955 – 1959.

Martin Strohmeier offers an essay explaining British plans for a university in Cyprus or another place in the Near East. Many readers will be grateful to the author for bringing to the public domain little known facts on the subject. Jan Asmussen writes about Cypriots in the British army. It is well known that a considerable number of Greek and Turkish Cypriots joined the British armed forces in 1939, even before the outbreak of the Greek-Italian war, but this essay provides details from sources that are not easily available.

### **Late Colonial Period, 1945 – 1955**

This part of the book contains essays on the development of strong and distinct national identities among Greek and Turkish Cypriots – identities which owed much to the national consciousness of Greece and Turkey respectively – and their expression in various political forces on the island. Two significant Turkish-Cypriot scholars Niyazi Kizilyurek and Huseyin Mehmet Atesin write enlighteningly about the little studied subject of how the Turkish-Cypriot community organised its social and political forces and articulated its political discourse, partly in reaction to increasingly vocal Greek-Cypriot demands for enosis. Nicos Peristianis, Christophoros Christophorou and Vassilis Protopapas provide sound and intelligent analyses of what, in retrospect, may be regarded as the creation of permanent cleavages between Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot political forces, and within Greek-Cypriots forces between those of leftist orientation and those of rightist-clericalist character. What seems to be missing from this section is a detailed discussion of the positions expressed by the two main Greek-Cypriot parties, AKEL and KEK, and the various Turkish-Cypriot groupings vis-à-vis the British proposal to offer the people of Cyprus a more liberal constitution containing certain inchoate elements of home rule. The public domain already contains some interesting material on this subject, which raises the question of why no Greek-Cypriot political group finally dared to take up and test the admittedly ungenerous British offer.

### **Final Colonial Period and the Road to Independence, 1955 – 1960**

By the early 1950s Britain's view that it had to maintain Cyprus as a military base came into conflict with both the Greek-Cypriot demand for enosis and the Turkish-Cypriot demand for the partition of the island between Turkey and Greece. George Kelling, Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, Oliver Richmond and Brendan O'Malley – all authors with established credentials – discuss this dramatic and violent period of Cypriot history mostly at the level of diplomatic and political activity. Joseph S. Joseph looks at the Zurich and London Agreements, and Hubert Faustmann considers the negotiations on the detailed treaties and the constitution of the new republic. There is a tendency among scholars to look at the circumstances in which the Zurich and London Agreements were concluded without giving a chance to the representatives of the Greek and Turkish communities to negotiate. They point to the privileges accorded to the Turkish community and the complicated power-sharing formulas in the 1960 constitution, and draw the conclusion that the constitution was at least a part of the reason why the settlement broke down in December 1963. These scholars are silent over the question, if Archbishop Makarios and his advisers were to have been given an opportunity to negotiate a political settlement with Kuchuk and Denktash, could they realistically have been expected to reach an amicable agreement? Another well-known writer, Makarios Drousiotis, who has researched the shadowy world of para-military organisations and conspiratorial right-wing politics in Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, contributes a gripping essay on what he calls "the Greco-Turkish para-state" and its impact on developments in Cyprus. Finally Robert Holland offers a thoughtful assessment of the historiography of late colonial Cyprus.

### **Post-Colonial Period 1960 to Present**

Various parts or aspects of British policy during the post-colonial period are discussed by Claude Nicolet, James Ker-Lindsay, Alan James, Keith Kyle and Tim Potier. None of these authors are Cypriot – indeed, the last four are British – and none of them, as far as I can tell, doubts British goodwill towards the people of Cyprus, at least to the extent that it seemed compatible with the protection of British strategic interests on the island. If an opinion poll were conducted among the people in the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot communities, each of them would produce the overwhelming result that the British discriminated against them and unjustly favoured the other side. The even-handedness which the British government tried to display after December 1963 earned it the mistrust of politicians on both sides of the divide, that it is Greek-Cypriot politicians who wanted a unitary state under majority rule and Turkish-Cypriot politicians who, in effect, wanted partition. Klearchos Kyriakides' discussion of the continuing value of the Sovereign Base Areas provides convincing evidence for the keen interest which Britain still has in the achievement of a federal settlement to the Cyprus problem acceptable to the two sides.

The collection includes three essays on the politically motivated ways in which Cyprus was depicted by British and other visitors to the island in photography, painting and writing, and literature. Mike Hajimichael argues that John Thomson's photographic expedition in Cyprus in autumn 1878 produced a famous set of photographs with accompanying text which offered "a distinctly colonial representation of Cyprus and its people". Rita Severis argues in rather similar vein that British artists – mostly amateur painters – produced pictures which represented Cyprus as a country with its own distinct social character and culture identity, a prominent feature of which was that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots peacefully lived side by side, under the benevolent rule of the British colonial elite, without any unfulfilled political aspirations. The most prominent intellectual villain of the piece for both Rita Severis and Petra Tournay-Theodotou was Lawrence Durrell, who edited the colonial government's *Cyprus Review* in the 1950s and wrote *Bitter Lemons* with its famously patronising portrayal of local people. The Greek nationalist reply to Durrell's book was Rodis Roufos' *Age of Bronze* and Costas Montis' *Closed Doors*.

The collection ends with three pieces described as 'documents'. One is an English translation of a pamphlet published in Greek in 1945 by HajiMatheos HajiNikola, an early Greek-Cypriot radical thinker. His pamphlet 'The Agrarian Class in Cyprus' offers an account of the plight of poor farmers in rural Cyprus, criticises the system of finance used by the bourgeoisie to exploit the farmers, and proposes a set of measures to alleviate rural suffering. This document is preceded by an introductory piece by Peter Loizos which offers some information about HajiMatheou and his times. Finally, there is a paper by former President George Vassiliou on 'Britain and the EU Accession of Cyprus'. Given that Vassiliou knows more than anybody else about the Cyprus Republic's negotiations for EU accession, and that the final accession of the country was widely held to be the greatest success of the Republic in the field of international relations, his judgment that "the relations between Cyprus and the British government, during the whole period of the accession process, had been harmonious" gives Cyprus-British relations a positive twist.

If I have any major criticism for this book, it is not so much that it contains this or that error, this or that weakness – errors and weaknesses can be found in every book – but rather that a study of its contents reveals a yawning gap, which undermines its claim to comprehensiveness. The book contains no detailed discussion of the EOKA revolt – the actual attacks by Greek-Cypriot guerrillas on British soldiers, civilians, property and installations, as well as attacks on Turkish policemen, countered by the violence and oppression by the colonial authorities against Greek-Cypriot people. This historical experience has marked indelibly British-Cypriot relations for a generation. The collection does not include any detailed discussion of the Turkish-Cypriot anti-enosis campaign, the formation of

Volkan and TMT, and the killing of Greek Cypriots outside Guenyeli, and the inter-communal violence of the summer of 1958 which created great tension between the two communities and led (with British consent) to the de facto creation of a Turkish municipality first in Nicosia and later in other towns. The development of relations between the colonial government and the Turkish-Cypriot community in the late 1950s is a badly under-studied subject, and even now there are many Greek Cypriots – including people of some education – who have no idea that British troops killed Turkish-Cypriot rioters and they persist in the illusion that Dr Kuchuk and Rauf Denktaş were collaborating with the colonial authorities to achieve British policy objectives.

Another area within the colonial period which is under-studied is the fact that there existed throughout the British period a large group of Greek-Cypriot people who did not support enosis. Such people were either more or less content with the colonial system or they were apathetic to political agitation, or in some cases they were opposed to violence and they positively disliked and feared EOKA. This group – not the majority, but certainly a considerable minority – consisted of diverse sub-groups, for example substantial numbers of civil servants, teachers in government schools and policemen; Greek-Cypriot judges, members of the colonial legal service and other senior cadres of the administration who enjoyed the friendship of colonial administrators; British-educated civilians – lawyers, doctors, engineers and other professionals – who felt a kind of loyalty to the country of their education and considered its culture superior to that of Greece; businessmen who traded with British firms and resented the EOKA-enforced boycott of British products; AKEL supporters who had no love for communist-baiter Grivas and EOKA or indeed “monarcho-fascist Greece”, and a certain number of leftists paid for their beliefs and indiscretions with their lives, to the dismay of their family and friends.

In fact the group of ‘philangloi’ (as the enosists called them) was large enough, and indeed educated and talented enough, to have retained its existence and influence into the era of independence, and it helped retain a good feeling and a cultural link with Britain, to the chagrin of nationalists. The basic elements of Anglophilia among Greek and Turkish Cypriots lie deep in their collective souls, and I venture to suggest that it has to do with a strong need of the Cypriot people to be accepted by the world as European, as part of the West, rather than East Mediterranean, let alone the Middle Eastern. During the colonial days British officials offered Cypriots (as they offered Indians and Africans and other colonial peoples) an image of what it is to be a European gentleman – an image of an English-speaking, smartly dressed, relatively prosperous, educated and articulate, well-mannered and refined man exuding quiet authority and confidence – and many ambitious young Cypriots took this image to their hearts.

**Zenon Stavrinides**