

# **Sources for the History of Cyprus**

**Edited by Paul W Wallace and Andreas G Orphanides:**

## **Volume CI: Enosis and the British: British Official Documents 1878-1950**

**Selected and edited by Reed Coughlan  
Greece and Cyprus Research Centre,  
(Altamont, New York, 2004)**

**xiv + 252 pp. bibliography, index,  
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This anthology of key documents relating to most of the period of British Colonial rule in Cyprus has the benefit of telling a complex story in simple and readable terms through the devices of a perspicacious introduction that sets the scene, and dividing the documents chronologically into thoughtful chapter titles, the fifth and final one being 'Prelude to the Struggle.'

In his introduction, Coughlan reveals what many less informed academics have tried to fudge, namely that the enosis campaign, or at least the build-up to it, existed long before World War One, even though there was a tendency on the part of the British to ignore it. He also provides insight into the mentality of English officials on the island, which appears to have included a certain degree of superciliousness; and he brings out the role of the education system and the Church leadership in pressing for enosis.

Chapter One, 'British Vacillation: 1878-1907' shows how, even at this early period of the Cyprus conundrum, bad blood between Greece and Turkey (the war of 1897) could affect intercommunal relations. It also demonstrates how Greek agitation for enosis: fermented in the schools; irritated the Turkish-speaking community. Fascinating insights into Greek and Turkish Cypriot political opinion is also revealed in newspaper articles. It is to Coughlan's credit that he has not confined himself merely to official correspondence.

Chapter Two, 'Churchill's Visit and the Aftermath: 1907-1927', includes his famous statement – some would say infamous – that it was "only natural that the Cypriot people, who are of Greek descent, should regard their incorporation with what may be called their Mother-country as an ideal to be earnestly, devoutly, and fervently cherished." The fact that despite such lip service, nothing happened, may

well have contributed to Greek Cypriot frustration and the riots of 1912. A tentative parallel can be drawn between another Churchillian statement – “It is the primary right of Man to die and kill for the land they [sic] live in” – and the later EOKA campaign.<sup>1</sup>

By the time we reach Chapter Three, ‘British Debate and Rising Demand for Enosis: 1929-1931,’ the reader has been fully inculcated into enosis. We see a combination of internal British debate, characterised by subtle debate between liberal-minded Foreign Office officials and more rigid ‘Little Englander’ Colonial Office types. Notwithstanding the arguments, official British rejection of Greek Cypriot arguments led to yet more frustration, the outbreak of the 1931 riots and the burning down of Government House. We are left with a sense of impending doom.

This materialises in Chapter Four, ‘The Riots of 1931 and the British Response, 1931-1935,’ when direct rule, censorship and deportations were imposed by London, with, to quote one writer “The British and Greeks in Cyprus retreating into their respective social and mental compartments.”<sup>2</sup> The chapter intelligently includes a famous article by Arnold Toynbee in *Survey of International Affairs*, which the Foreign Office tried to suppress. By the end of this chapter, it becomes clear to the reader that it must only be a matter of time before a true crisis arises.

The final chapter, ‘Prelude to the Struggle: 1935-1950,’ is surprisingly short, but nevertheless pithy. Apart from again showing the tensions between different strands of thinking in the Colonial and Foreign Offices respectively, the chapter includes a fascinating British intelligence bulletin so clear and unbiased in its content, that it could be construed as putting the case for enosis!

Once one arrives at the end of the book, with 96 per cent of the Greek Cypriots voting in favour of enosis (a demand that was simply ignored by Britain), one is sufficiently interested to find out what happened, and how it happened, next.

The book would have been strengthened by at least some reference to Foreign Office documents, and to avoid this criticism, the editor could have included ‘Colonial Papers’ in the title. For example, a senior Foreign Office official wrote in 1947: “The views of the Colonial Office are not worth having on the subject.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a quote by another senior Foreign office official would have come in useful:

In more normal circumstances, the early cession of Cyprus to Greece might well be a wise policy, justified by considerations not only of justice, but also of expediency. But present circumstances are not normal.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these – perhaps express – lacunae, they are documentary lacunae which would only add to the usefulness of this book, rather than alter its thrust. It is an indispensable reference tool for all historians interested in Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean and British imperial and foreign policy, particularly because it brings out oft ignored social factors.

### **William Mallinson**

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1. Quoted in Mallinson, William (2005) *Cyprus: A Modern History*. London and New York, IB Tauris, p. 1, PRO FO953/1708, PG11928/230.
2. Holland, Robert (1998) *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus 1914-1959*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 10. A rather tortuously written book, which omits some crucial documents.
3. Mallinson, William, (2001) 'A Partitioned Cyprus 40 Years after Qualified Sovereignty vs. Morality', *Defensor Pacis*, Issue 7, January 2001, Athens, PRO FO371/67084, R 13462/G.
4. *Ibid.*, Wallinger, 24 October 1947, memo on file jacket.