

Medieval Cyprus: A Place of Cultural Encounter

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The eleventh volume of the distinguished series ‘Schriften des Instituts für Interdisziplinäre Zypern-Studien’ of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Cypriot Studies of the University of Münster constitutes a valuable addition to the corpus of scholarship on medieval Cyprus. The series has deservedly earned a prestigious position in the field of Cypriot studies, its publications being the outcome of conferences, regularly organised by the Institute on broad thematical and chronological areas of the history of Cyprus and across many scholarly disciplines.

The volume under review is a collection of the papers delivered at a three-day conference held in Münster in December 2012 and co-organised by the Institutes for Interdisciplinary Cypriot Studies and of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of the University of Münster. The invited speakers – all well-known experts on the history and culture of medieval Cyprus from the fields of political, social, and religious history, archaeology, and art history – study the medieval history of Cyprus as that of a frontier land, situated within a political and cultural context that was both western and oriental. Chronologically, the term ‘medieval’ describes a thousand years of the island’s history, incorporating both the Byzantine (fourth century-1191) and the Latin (Frankish and Venetian) period (1191/2-1570/1). Thematically, all scholars agree that the Mediterranean provided the conditions for the inhabitants of Cyprus to be both isolated from and in contact with other peoples and their cultures, convincingly demonstrating that the permeability of the political frontier allowed intercultural encounters, albeit painful, and was in the long run culturally enriching.

The fourteen contributions are organised in four sections. The first section includes studies that deal with various aspects of the island’s political history. Michael Grünbbart’s paper offers an interesting interpretation of the ideological nature and the degree of legitimacy of Isaakios Doukas Komnenos’s usurpation of power in Cyprus (1184-1191), comparing the way it is presented in contemporary sources with that of other usurpations, in particular, the one by Andronikos I Komnenos in Constantinople. Peter Edbury investigates the beginnings of the island’s Lusignan rule (1191-1232),

using the Latin Eastern narrative sources known as the *Old French Continuations of William of Tyre* and the *Chronicle of Ernoul and Bernard the Treasurer*. By deciphering the complex manuscript tradition and the often ambiguous relationship of the various versions of the texts, Edbury is able to identify the oldest, nearest to or most reliable account of specific historical events and to correct misconceptions concerning both the texts and the events. K. Scott Parker addresses the issue of the presence of the Oriental Christian confessions in Frankish Cyprus, offering a synthesis of the extant literature, but also focusing on the effects the 1365 Alexandria crusade of the most famous of the Lusignan kings, Peter I, had on these minorities. Alexander Beihammer skilfully investigates the political role of the Kingdom of Cyprus during the first Ottoman-Venetian war (1463-1479), a period that coincided with the civil war between Queen Charlotte and her half-brother James, the assumption of power by the latter, and the reign of Caterina Cornaro under Venetian tutelage; using both western and oriental sources, Beihammer underlines the rapidly emerging political and military importance of the island for the *Serenissima*. Chris Schabel's overview of the research undertaken by himself and his collaborators for the three-volume *Bullarium Cyprium* appropriately closes the first section; the author also discusses future plans, that will expand the geographical and chronological boundaries of research undertaken with papal letters.

The three papers that compose the second section explore aspects of the economic and commercial life of medieval Cyprus. Tassos Papacostas studies exhaustively the administration and the economic activities of Cypriot monasteries in the Middle Byzantine period, arguing that, through the successful exploitation of their estates, monastic foundations acquired an increasingly important economic role. Marina Solomidou-Ieronymidou deals with the manufacturing process of the island's most famous product during the Lusignan rule: sugar; she provides an account of the remains of a number of sugar mills built during the period, describing them as a fine example of pre-industrial workshops. Nicholas Coureas's paper studies the commercial activities between Cyprus and another two Mediterranean islands, Sardinia and Majorca, using the early-fourteenth century notarial deeds of the Genoese Lamberto di Sambuceto, who was residing and working in Famagusta at the time.

The third section includes papers that examine the rich material culture of medieval Cyprus. Eleni Procopiou provides a detailed report for the period 2007-2014 of the ongoing excavations at Akrotiri-*Katalymata ton Plakoton*; the excavations have revealed a unique for Cyprus ecclesiastical complex, maybe a *martyrion*, datable to the early-seventh century, a period marked by significant political changes in the region. In a fascinating study, Maria Parani investigates the relatively understudied daily life material culture in Cyprus in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries; Parani discusses a number of objects that reflect a luxurious way of life for the royalty, the aristocracy, and the wealthy burgesses and reveal a hybrid society living between western and

oriental culture. Joanita Vroom explores iconographical aspects of human depictions in ceramics from Cyprus from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, using examples of both gesture and non-gesture, while Ulrike Ritzerfeld focuses on the luxury metal objects commissioned by the court of the Lusignans, studying them as examples of cross-cultural exchanges and as the expression of a Levantine artistic *koine*. Michalis Olympios investigates fifteenth-century architecture in Cyprus, using in a thorough and highly readable way the often ignored by scholarship 'loose, undated and unprovenanced architectural members' (p. 309).

The last section consists only of one paper, but this is substantial enough, in both size and content, to justify its closing the volume. Myrto Veikou traces insular and continental patterns of settlement in Cyprus from Late Antiquity to the twelfth century, examining the successive relocations of the island's capital (Paphos, Constantia, and Nicosia) and comparing the Cypriot case with that on Andros and Sicily.

Naturally, this stimulating volume conforms with the high editorial standards set by the series. It is meticulously edited and the choice of complementing each paper with a bibliographical list is very useful for the reader. The volume can be consulted with confidence by scholars and students of the history of medieval Cyprus. Its global approach, that goes beyond conventional chronological periodisations and thematic or geographical categorisations of fields of studies, allows a fruitful conversation amongst Byzantinists, scholars of the Latin East and the Greek world under Latin rule, and western medievalists across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Most importantly, it opens new vistas for the understanding of the medieval Mediterranean world in terms of both conflict and interaction. The encounter and constructive mingling with foreign peoples in their capacity as either conquerors and colonists or traders and pilgrims had been a recurrent pattern in the history of Cyprus and one that bore testimony to the absorbing power of an insular space that favoured cultural uniformity but also allowed novelty with cosmopolitan tolerance. These phenomena also determined ethnic and cultural identity/ies in medieval Cyprus but the investigation of such a complex issue requires a new conference and a new volume!

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