

## *Sendall in Cyprus, 1892–1898: A Governor in Bondage*

DIANA MARKIDES

Moufflon Publications Ltd. (Nicosia, 2014), 233 pp.

ISBN: 978-9963642328

Diana Markides is one of the foremost historians of Cyprus under British rule and the author of numerous important studies characteristically based on very solid archival research. Carrying on this record of empirically sound scholarship, *Sendall in Cyprus* is a project the author has obviously taken to heart: this small book is printed on elegant glossy paper, contains numerous watercolour paintings, photographs and original documents (close to thirty illustrations in total) which offer a rich visual experience of late nineteenth century Cyprus, and draws on a wide range of sources, from official archives held both in London and Cyprus, to newspapers of the time, through private correspondence, diaries and official publications. Delivered in clear and elegant prose, the main purpose of this book is to throw light on a somewhat neglected early period of British rule uneasily poised as it is between ‘the excitement of the initial (...) occupation of the island, and the more turbulent early twentieth century’ (p. 9) and too often dismissed as being characterised by the unqualified indifference of colonial authorities for both the island and its inhabitants. Constantly reminding us of the difference of perspectives between the Colonial Office and the Cyprus government, Markides argues instead that at least during the six years of Sir Walter Sendall’s term as high commissioner, several attempts were made to improve daily life in Cyprus within, of course, the limitations of a colonial form of rule by definition not always attentive to local demands. That not more could have been done to better, at least materially, the lives of Cypriots was due to the British government’s – particularly the Treasury’s – inflexibility which in effect kept Sendall and other, perhaps less inspired, high commissioners and governors ‘in bondage’.

Although spanning the entire colonial period (1878–1960), Markides’ work has for the most part focused on what may be called the late colonial period (1930s–1960s). Instead, *Sendall in Cyprus* takes us back to the very early days of British rule at the turn of the century. This is a well explored period, most notably in the works of George S. Georghallides, Rolandos Katsiaounis, Andrekos Varnava and Rebecca Bryant. Yet the novelty in Diana Markides’ approach consists in revisiting these times through the eyes of a British governor in a series of six chapters, each devoted to the successive years in

Sendall's term, and an epilogue. Sendall is possibly not the most famous of the early British governors and is certainly less broadly known than Sir Garnet Wolseley, the island's first governor whose somewhat disparaging views on Cyprus can be found in his published diary, Sir Robert Biddulph, the governor who oversaw the establishment of the Legislative Council, Cyprus' colonial parliament, or Sir Charles King-Harman considered sensibly more sympathetic to the national feelings of the Greek Cypriots. And yet Markides paints the portrait of a very proactive official, whose work ethic broke with his predecessors' proverbial nonchalance and induced him to take a number of long-lasting initiatives such as the development of the island's infrastructure, roads and external communications which had considerable impact on Cyprus' economy facilitating the domestic and international circulation of its main crops (tobacco, fruit); his consistent and determined support to the development and rationalisation of the management of education primarily through the establishment in 1895 of two 'pancyprian boards of education – one Muslim and one Christian – whose task would be to supervise and regulate village school committees' (p. 117); the vigorous steps taken for the preservation of the island's antiquities, enabling a 'transition from looting to learning' in archaeological excavations; crucially, the reform of a draconian tax system (p. 148) which until then had stifled agriculturalists causing a significant number of them to be imprisoned unable as they were to pay their debts to usurious moneylenders (p. 69); and the restoration of law and order and the drastic reduction of the crime rate – which Markides argues is 'the most eloquent testimony to th[e] improved quality [of life] during Sendall's term' (p. 205) – illustrated by the arrest and execution of the notorious Hassanpouli brothers often depicted as Cypriot Robin Hoods (pp. 137–138).

All this helped improve the relations between Cypriots (Greek and Turkish) and British authorities. Indeed the able governor, argues Markides, seems to have taken the fate of the island's inhabitants to heart and demanded of his officials that they interact with them, most notably by making it a requirement for British officials to learn Greek and/or Turkish (p. 30) and by himself consulting 'Cypriots at all levels' (p. 57). This in turn contributed to establishing Sendall's long-lasting popularity. 'The Cypriots,' writes Markides, 'found themselves with a governor, who not only worked, but who wanted to work *with them* for the island' (p. 121). Markides evokes numerous instances of popular effusion for the governor (e.g. p. 134), including an appeal to Queen Victoria by both Christian and Muslim notables that Sendall may stay in Cyprus at the end of his term (pp. 194–195) (in this regard, annexes and illustrations include a picture of a modern plaque dedicated to Sendall at the entrance of the Phaneromeni school and poems written for the governor by Vassilis Michaelides and Demetris Libertis). Yet as Markides notes in terms that could apply to some of Sendall's successors (Sir William Denis Battershill, 1939–1941, comes to mind) such displays of public favour were always entwined with

expectations that governors could not or would not always fulfil and dissonances of this kind could pave the way for bitter misunderstandings.

Not everything Sendall attempted to do was successful although Markides most often exonerates the governor citing unsurmountable external difficulties. One such failure was the registration of private property owing, according to the author, to the ‘complexities of hereditary arrangements in the Ottoman system, the undefined boundaries of ecclesiastical properties, the vagaries of the *vakoufs*, together with the extent of land mortgaged and remortgaged’ (p. 140). To the extent that tax reform would have been invaluable in an overwhelmingly agricultural island, this was a serious setback. From the point of view of British policy it may be argued that successful as it may have been, the exponential development of education backfired as it considerably facilitated the spread of – particularly Greek – nationalism which throughout the years would take an increasingly anticolonial turn. After following a school curriculum increasingly modelled on the Greek one, affluent graduates of Cypriot secondary schools could pursue their higher education in vibrant centres of Hellenism, such as Athens or Alexandria, before returning in Cyprus where they took the lead of their community’s cultural and political life. National ideas cultivated in schools and universities could indeed be freely expressed and debated in the enhanced civic space created by the British through the free press and electoral institutions (the Legislative Council) (p. 165). Sendall’s term in effect coincided with a period when Cyprus became fully incorporated into the intellectual Eastern Mediterranean network promoting Greek nationalism and Cypriots followed and sometimes participated in Greece’s expansionist wars – such as the 1897 Greek-Turkish War (pp. 174–175). Relayed throughout the island by mushrooming literary and philanthropic societies, such nationalist ideas could occasionally poison intercommunal relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots as happened during the celebrations of Greek independence on 25 March 1895 when Greek Orthodox schoolchildren marched through the Muslim neighbourhood of Tahtakale in Nicosia ‘singing songs about slaughtering the hated Turks’ (p. 106).

Nothing however would pre-empt more Sendall’s policy in Cyprus than the Tribute, namely the sum of money – deducted from the island’s fiscal receipts minus the budgetary expenses – Britain committed to pay the Ottoman Empire in 1878 which was commuted in 1881 into a Cypriot contribution to the Ottoman debt to British bondholders. The governor’s several appeals to alleviate the burden of the Tribute systematically collided with the British Treasury’s obduracy to the point where Sendall would privately complain that the latter held him ‘under bondage’ and ask to be appointed elsewhere. In 1895, the newly appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain, an important reformer of the colonial service, receptive to Sendall’s pleas, arranged an annual £40,000 grant-in-aid which relieved Cyprus’ budget. Despite this however, and notwithstanding

Diana Markides' eloquent efforts to argue otherwise, Sir Walter Sendall remained for all purposes a manager of scarcity. This is perhaps the main criticism that can be levelled against this book: although adopting the perspective of an apparently good-willing colonial governor efficiently nuances the widely accepted assumption of British administrative neglect in Cyprus, one is still left to wonder if it constitutes an epistemological break. If the short-sightedness on the part of the British government was so exacting, how much difference could a hardworking governor actually make? Markides convincingly makes her case that Sendall stands out among Cyprus' British governors; yet the reader also gets the impression that the initiatives of officials – imaginative as they may have occasionally been – made little difference against the iron law of bureaucratic hierarchy. Paradoxically it could be that this is the reason why, aside from students of colonial Cyprus, this book will appeal to all those interested in the mechanics of turn-of-the-century British imperialism as it very clearly elucidates the differences in priorities and perspectives between Downing Street and the 'men on the spot'.

**ALEXIS RAPPAS**