

‘Circling Round the Economic Sun of Britain’:¹ Cyprus and Its Participation in the British Empire Exhibitions

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Abstract

The study offers an examination of Cyprus’s participation in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 in London. Drawing on unpublished archival material, the study investigates for the first time the history of Cyprus’s exhibition representation and explores the colonial government’s early steps in cultural policy. By assembling and examining the Cyprus pavilions’ exhibits, architecture, decorations and exhibition catalogues, as well as the official correspondence, the study forms the following argument: Cyprus, at the 1886 and 1924 exhibitions, was curated, displayed and performed through the British imperial gaze. The exhibition committees were responsible for selecting what they considered characteristic specimens of Cyprus’s historical past and colonial present. The study argues that a perceived identity for Cyprus, conforming to the imperial agenda of colonial development and profit-making, was projected and communicated to British and foreign audiences through several and diverse visual media.

Keywords: Cyprus, British empire, exhibition, colonial, cultural policy, art, identity, Palestine

Introduction

Cyprus under British rule (1878-1959) participated in several colonial and international exhibitions and fairs. Two of the most noteworthy were the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, both in London. This study focuses on the two exhibitions and supports the argument that an ‘invented tradition’ and hybrid identity for Cyprus, comprised primarily of Christian-Greek, Muslim-Ottoman and Victorian/Edwardian British characteristics was constructed by the country’s exhibition committees, and accommodated in the space of the Cyprus pavilions.³ The discussion which follows examines the ways the 1886 and 1924 pavilions *narrated* a visual fable, performed to the British and foreign audiences through the extensive and repetitive use of visual resources. The study proposes that Cyprus’s participation in the empire exhibitions is an important source of new information, their

1 E. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (London: Penguin, 1999) 114.

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3 E. Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14.

analysis offering a better understanding of Cypriot colonial culture. This preliminary study, on a subject that remains unexplored until now, retrieves unpublished archival material from the Cyprus State Archives. The study presents and analyses this material for the first time, and by doing so, it contributes to the literature of colonial Cyprus.

The main research objective of this study is to assemble and deconstruct, through discourse analysis, the visual narrative of colonial Cyprus, as this was exemplified in the 1886 and 1924 empire exhibitions. In order to achieve this, the various and diverse media employed for the synthesis of the Cypriot pavilions will be identified and analysed. The structure of the exhibition committees, the range of exhibitors and exhibits, the financial conditions that affected these participations and the colonial politics that surrounded them will all be examined in order to facilitate a better understanding of the context in which these participations were realised.

An important finding of this research is that a rich visual narrative, put together through the imperial gaze of the British exhibition committees, conformed to the colonial agenda and encompassed Western European notions of progress and civilizational development. As we will see later on, these notions were typical of the period the exhibitions took place in. The discussion which follows and the findings which result from this research derive mostly from written accounts of the time, such as the *Report and Handbook to Cyprus*, produced by the Commissioner of the 1886 participation. Furthermore, extracts of notices from the British press of the time shed light on the so far obscure lines that shape Cyprus's representation. Similarly, information on Cyprus's 1924 participation is accessed via the official guide of the exhibition, the commissioner's brief review, and other correspondence between the commissioner and the colonial government, all *tucked away* in the Cyprus State Archives up until this point. The study also draws information on the visual narrative created for Cyprus through the study of woodcuts, found in the above written sources. These woodcuts illustrate, for example, the 1886 pavilion from various angles. Finally, the set of written and visual tools used for this analysis is completed by the following: paintings, drawings, etchings, photographs, postcards, pottery, handicrafts, such as embroideries and jewellery design, the architecture and decorations of the pavilions, and life-size mannequins representing Cypriot (stereo-) 'types'.

Currently, substantial scholarly research and thorough analysis of archival material regarding Cyprus's participations in British Empire exhibitions is extremely limited. India and the settler colonies have attracted the most scholarly attention, Malta and Palestine in the Mediterranean and Near East regions were researched somewhat less, and Cyprus has been neglected altogether.⁴ As a result, the country's coordinates are

4 See for example P. H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001); P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and*

still missing from this grand map of colonial representations, leaving a gap in the historiography of empire and exhibitions culture, in Cyprus’s modern cultural history and the history of the British empire. This original study aims in addressing this issue by expanding our knowledge in the above field through the study of Cyprus’s case, and to a lesser degrees Palestine’s, which shared a pavilion with the former in the British Empire Exhibition of 1924. The colonial era is made of infinitely inter-connected local histories; by extending our knowledge on Cyprus’s participation in the British Empire Exhibitions, we are also informed about other histories, for example the British and the Palestinian. Finally, this study may be considered as the starting point for the exploration of Cyprus’s history in the British Empire Exhibitions, from which further studies may be conducted in the future. (See Figure 1)

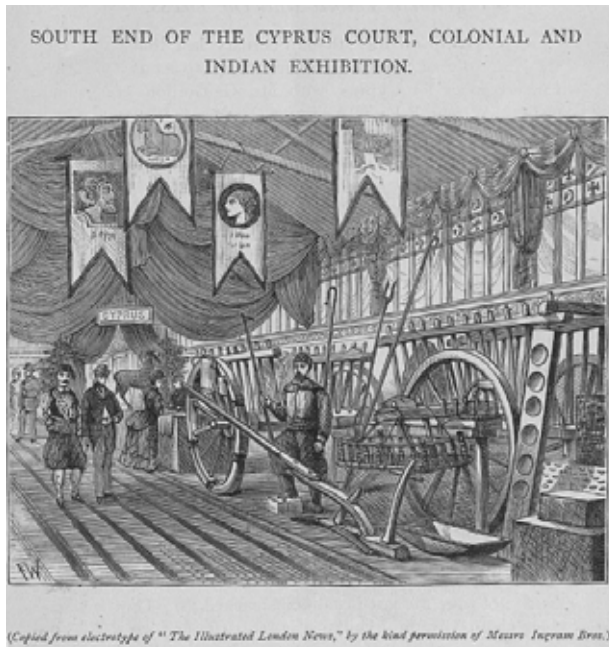


Figure 1: ‘South End of the Cyprus Court, Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Copied from electrotype of *The Illustrated London News*, by the kind permission of Messrs Ingram Bros.’, R. H. Lang, *Report (with three woodcuts) upon the results of the Cyprus representation at the Colonial & Indian Exhibition of 1886* (Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1886).

The Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924

The Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 are to be examined for the purpose of this study. These two exhibitions have been selected from the long list of empire exhibitions for a number of reasons. A practical reason is that the primary material found at the Cyprus State Archives is considerably more extensive than for any other participation. Furthermore, their recognised importance in the historiography of British Empire Exhibitions makes them valuable research material.⁵ These exhibitions are particularly interesting since they are not monothematic shows focusing on, and at the same time restricted to, a single aspect of the participating countries' image, for example its agricultural or industrial produce. Several other exhibitions, in which Cyprus also participated, exhibited exclusively minerals, horticulture, agriculture and animals, such as the International Cotton Exhibition of 1914 in London, the Imperial Forestry Conference of 1920 and the Tobacco Exhibition of 1927 in London. On the contrary and quite distinctly, as interpreted by historians such as Annie E. Coombes, the periodic shows of 1886 and 1924 were well-performed multifaceted public spectacles, where the visitor could be entertained and instructed about the empire.⁶

As Paul Greenhalgh argues, despite the contrasting characteristics of the eras of which the empire exhibitions were a part, a standard set of reasons justified their organisation throughout the nineteenth and until the mid-twentieth centuries. The most significant of these reasons were peace amongst nations, education of the masses, trade, and progress.⁷ Nevertheless, selecting as case studies two exhibitions that are separated almost by a four-decade break gives rise to considerations. For example, the fact that the 1886 and 1924 exhibitions belong in different chronological, economic and social contexts is by itself problematic. Their choice however is supported by the fact that the preliminary findings of this original investigation will offer a new angle of vision on the colonial state in Cyprus. Specifically, they will inform the reader about imperial ideas on economic and cultural development, and to what degree these changed (or did not) over an almost 40-year span, from the 1880s to the 1920s, covering half the period of British rule in the country.

The 1886 exhibition took place during the Victorian era, when Britain was still prosperous, confident and strong, when it had the world at its feet, and peace had prevailed until the empire joined the First World War in 1914. This exhibition was a profitable enterprise, aiming primarily to enhance trade relations between Britain and

5 P. Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 114.

6 A. E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 63.

7 Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 17.

its colonies, and also to entertain and inform its British audience about the empire. Britain’s global expansion, financial developments, technological advances, and capitalist growth were all showcased. As Eric Hobsbawm aptly wrote: ‘The exhibitions [...] were a kind of planetary system circling round the economic sun of Britain’.⁸

On the other hand, the 1924 exhibition was organised under very different circumstances, only a few years after the end of the Great War, and only a year after the peace treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923. During these post-war years, Britain and the British people suffered from material and psychological losses. The people therefore had to regain their faith in the empire. They had to be reassured by their government that they were still the citizens of a ruling nation and that they would recuperate successfully from the wounds of the War because, as it would be shown in this exhibition, they had all the resources, skills and capacity to do so. The 1924 exhibition was the product of an inter-war era when Britain strived to generate a collective popular enthusiasm for and faith in empire.⁹

The vital role of the colonies’ participation in these exhibitions was abundantly emphasised. Circular despatches related to the 1924 exhibition, stressed that the leading purpose of the undertaking was to take stock of British colonial resources and to ascertain, particularly in raw materials, how far these resources were developed.¹⁰ The 1924 exhibition was an attempt in finding practical solutions to the colonies’ commercial and administrative problems, so that new sources of imperial wealth could be exploited to help repair the material losses of the Great War and contribute towards the individual prosperity of each colony. As with the 1886 exhibition, it was also emphasised that the 1924 exhibition was an opportunity for the colonies to promote their products by bringing them ‘before the world’.¹¹

At the same time, empire exhibitions also focused on their ethnographic component, demonstrated through cultural displays and lectures on ‘native’ art, history, archaeology and religion. The ethnographic exposition’s purpose was to let people know about Britain’s authority over the world’s cultural heritage and at the same time, to educate the British public about the world beyond their homeland.¹² This projection of power, expressed literally in the form of physical control over other peoples, but also through an attempted control over their culture and heritage, is examined below, using the examples of Cyprus’s participations in the 1886 and 1924 exhibitions.

8 Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, 114.

9 J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Opinion 1880-1960*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 96-120.

10 Cyprus State Archive [CSA], SA1:473/1919/1, Circular, 1922, 39-44.

11 CSA, SA1:473/1919/1, Bradbury Director, Representative of the Board of Trade to Cyprus Chief Secretary 1920, 21.

12 N. E. Roberts, ‘Palestine on Display: The Palestine Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924’, *The Arab Studies Journal*, Vol.15, No. 1, (2007), 70-89, 71.

The Vision of the ‘Welcoming Empire’

Welcome! welcome! with one voice
In your welfare we rejoice,
Sons and brothers that have sent,
From Isle and Cape and Continent,
Produce of your field and flood,
Mount and mine and primal wood,
Works of subtle brain and hand,
And splendours of the morning land,
Gifts from every British zone.

Britons, hold your own! (Lord Tennyson, 1886)

Research at the Cyprus State Archives has brought to light a special issue of *The Cyprus Gazette*, published on 6 May 1886. This issue was dedicated to the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, where Cyprus participated with its own pavilion. The issue, published for the general information of the English-speaking public of Cyprus, included congratulatory messages for Cyprus’s participation, for example from the Prince of Wales and the Queen. It also included Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate’s ‘Ode on the Opening of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition’.¹³ This piece of poetic propaganda, composed by one of the most popular and celebrated poets of the Victorian era, proclaimed the Victorian idealistic pre-First World War vision of nineteenth century Britain.

According to Tennyson, the 1886 exhibition intended to gather on common ground and ‘into one Imperial whole’ all the colonies and dependencies of the British Empire, ‘from Isle and Cape and Continent’, connected by ‘one life, one flag, one fleet, one throne’, and all guarded by a Christian God. Tennyson’s use of vivid visual imagery evoked a representation of the world which had as its epicentre the ‘Island-state’ of Great Britain, whose flag flew ‘between sea and sky’ ‘welding’ together everything and everyone in between. This vision of the welcoming Empire worked on many levels.

The intended result of the poem was arguably to create in the reader of the time, both British and British subject, a sense of pride, privilege and empowerment for belonging to the empire’s realm. ‘Mother’ Britain was inviting all her colonial ‘sons’ to her ‘nest’, wishing that in the following years she would be ‘featured’ in them. In other words, the aim was that peoples under British rule would be raised in the image and likeness of Britain in the British high ideals of the era. It was believed, or at least hoped, that in this way they would develop into being *civilised*, *modernised* and *Europeanised* British subjects.

On another level, Britain was welcoming to this exhibition all her colonial children, to ‘cleave to one another’, side by side, displaying their ‘produce of [...] field and flood, / Mount and mine’, to meet and greet and collaborate and finally *profit* from

13 CSA, SA1: 1890/1886, 789.

each other. Furthermore, the exhibition was welcoming its British audience to meet their ‘sons and brothers’ from ‘every British zone’ accommodated temporarily in the exhibition space, and to listen to their diverse, nevertheless British-influenced ‘myriad voices call’. Britain’s personification as the primal mother, takes enormous proportions in this poem.

As much as Tennyson’s vision offered an ideological standpoint, shared within Victorian high society, facilitating a viable narrative for the organisation of the empire exhibition of 1886, there was arguably a more important and a more realistic objective of this exhibition: profit. Profit was to result through the development of trade relations between the various participating parts of the empire, showing their progress through the display of their products, manufactures and resources.¹⁴ Cyprus’s colonial government, as all the participating governments, hoped that the country would benefit financially from this undertaking, leading to its gradual but steady economic expansion. However, the archival evidence shows that financial obstacles and also the country’s still unmodernised state affected Cyprus’s quality of participation in the 1886 and future exhibitions. In this way the development of trade relations with other colonies was discouraged, and arguably decelerated Cyprus’s pace of economic growth and modernisation processes.

The Colonial Government’s Exhibition Participation Policy

Cyprus, under British imperial rule, participated, or was requested to participate but declined the invitation usually due to financial reasons, in more than 160 international and colonial exhibitions, shows and fairs. The participation policy of Cyprus’s colonial government in colonial and international exhibitions, annual, periodical or commemorative, was largely irregular throughout the period of the British occupation. Cyprus’s poor representation in empire exhibitions, as in the case of the British Empire Exhibition of 1938 in Glasgow, or its absence from them, for example from the 1934 and 1936 Levant Fair in Tel-Aviv, seems to reflect a particular attitude towards economic development among colonial officials.¹⁵

The colonial government was unwilling to invest in Cyprus’s promotion abroad due to the limited funds available from the country’s local revenue. Furthermore, local merchants, invited to promote specimens of their produce in exhibitions abroad, many times did so almost reluctantly and only after the prompting of the government. They were reluctant to invest money and produce in undertakings organised outside the country because they considered these a risk with controversial and uncertain benefit. An example is found in the complaints made by some of the merchants participating

¹⁴ CSA, SA1: 1966/1886, Memorandum, 3 July 1885, 2-5.

¹⁵ CSA, SA1: 659/1937.

in the 1924 exhibition without making profit. For instance, C. Christodoulou & Co., Cypriot importers of cotton piece goods, manufacturer of native cotton and silk tissues, embroideries and all articles of Cyprus handicraft, complained that the 'Pavilion people' had decided to sell the exhibited items at a higher price than previously agreed, thus affecting sales.¹⁶

For the colonial government, exhibition participation was a complicated issue demanding consideration. This is evident in several samples of written communication between colonial administrators, as in the case of the Cyprus Colonial Secretary and the country's Trade Commissioner in London, in December 1927. The two were discussing the *unspoken rule* which said that, when a country was committing to participate in an annual exhibition, it agreed automatically to participate in all succeeding exhibitions, often for several years to come, otherwise withdrawal gave rise to harmful criticism.¹⁷ Nevertheless, research has revealed that this was not the case with Cyprus, since even though it participated in some annual or biannual exhibitions, it did not always participate in successive shows, mainly because of financial reasons. An example of the latter is Cyprus's participation in the Levant Fair in Tel-Aviv. Cyprus participated in the 1932 fair but not in the following shows of 1934 and 1936. Periodic exhibitions were similarly treated, despite the fact that they were a seemingly different matter, since they were isolated events not requiring the colonial governments' long-term commitment.

In the case of Cyprus, participation in international exhibitions was usually organised by exhibition committees consisting mostly of British officials and some Cypriot members of the mercantile class. For example, the 1886 committee consisted of Commissioner R. Hamilton Lang, Capt. Wisely, and G. Gordon Hake, the Cyprus High Commissioner, Colonel F. Warren and other British colonial and London personnel. The committee also included D. Pierides, T. Peristiany, E. Constantinides, Hussein Effendi, and Mehmet Ali. Similarly, the 1924 Committee consisted of Commissioner R. L. N. Michell (after his resignation, Walter Bevan assumed duty as Cyprus representative on 21 September 1923), also the Deputy Commissioner P. Symeonides, the British Official Captain L. Jones and, as with the committee of the 1886 exhibition, Cypriot merchants of Greek and Turkish descent, such as L. Z. Pierides and Irfan Effendi.

Most exhibitors were primarily Cypriot traders of Greek descent. On several occasions, governmental institutions, such as the Cyprus Museum, erected in 1882, as well as British officials, also lent objects from their collections, for example Cypriot antiquities.¹⁸ Unfortunately, archival research has not so far revealed indications of the

16 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/ 3, 13 January 1926, 39-40.

17 CSA, SA1: 1191/1926/1, 62-63.

18 R. H. Lang, Handbook to Cyprus (with Map of Island): and Catalogue of the Exhibits, (Foreign and

general response of the Cypriot public to these participations. Therefore, until and if further information becomes available, we are left to assume that the mass of the Cypriot population had nothing to do with them. This assumption is further enhanced by an archival entry, which shows that when the Archbishop of Cyprus and the Mufti, the two distinguished Cypriot representatives of the Greek and Turkish communities of the country, were invited by the High Commissioner to participate in the local organising committee of the 1886 exhibition, they declined ‘for private reasons’.¹⁹

The issue of Cyprus being poorly or inadequately represented in the exhibition preoccupied the exhibitions’ commissioners and often became the topic of conversation between them and the colonial administration. For example, regarding the 1924 exhibition, in an early letter, sent by Major W. H. Flinn, Assistant Secretary to the colonial government, to Ronald L. N. Michell, Cyprus’s pavilion first commissioner, Flinn expressed his discomfort with the fact that it was ‘difficult to stir up sufficient enthusiasm’ amongst the Cypriot wine-merchants. The merchants could not be persuaded to send fine specimens for display because, as explained, they did not ‘readily appreciate the value of advertisement’.²⁰ Cypriot merchants were not willing to advertise in the press either, for instance in the *Times*, which featured promotional material from various empire territories, such as Palestine.²¹ As a result, the Cypriot pavilion was also poorly represented in the press, referred to ‘in the most meagre fashion’.²²

Palestine, on the other hand, Cyprus’s ‘competitor’, was mentioned several times in the press ‘for the obvious reason’ that it had advertised.²³ The Mandate was an example which was often used by Cyprus’s commissioner as a yardstick, to put pressure on the colonial government to invest more in the Cypriot representation, and to ‘recognise the desirability of securing for Cyprus rather more publicity and prominence’.²⁴ However, these attempts were usually unsuccessful, and this is evident, for example, in the small amount of £122.3.6d. spent on Cyprus’s publicity in the 1924 exhibition.²⁵

Participation in the empire exhibitions conformed to the colonial agenda. It aimed in promoting the development of trade relations with other colonies and Britain; in advertising Cyprus as a tourist resort and; in creating cultural relations within the Commonwealth and beyond. However, these goals were not always met. In the case of the 1886 exhibition, Cyprus’s commissioner concluded that fruitful trade

Commonwealth Office Collection, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1886a), 36.

19 CSA, SA1: 1966/1886, Memorandum, 3 July 1885, 5.

20 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, 15 December 1922, 5.

21 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, 336.

22 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Comm. Bevan to Nicosia’s Chief Secretary, 14 May 1924, 336.

23 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Chief Secretary, 14 May 1924, 336.

24 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan, 336.

25 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Acting Chief Secretary Nicosia to Comm. Bevan, 6 April 1925, 414.

collaborations for Cyprus were not achieved.²⁶ Lang explained that this was due to the fact that Cypriot merchants still had to ‘modernise’ and conform to European standards of trade in order to answer some of the needs of the British or international market. Trade development, therefore, was to take some time in Cyprus, until it got to a point where it could bring profit to the colony. This was evidently true. However, it could be argued that another important factor contributing to this result was the colonial government’s irregular exhibition policy and poor investment in the quality of representation. As will be further discussed, the colonial government’s attitude in regards to exhibition participation reflected a general attitude regarding policy-making (or the lack of it), especially on subjects related to the cultural life of the country.

Cyprus in London: ‘Possessed and Contained’²⁷

Banners, Paintings, Objects and Textual Representations

The organising committees responsible for Cyprus’s participation in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 assembled, curated and displayed a colonial identity for Cyprus, using an array of visual resources and exerting influence in an international political arena, as well as in a local cultural and economic one.²⁸ A historical narrative for Cyprus was reimagined, giving a visual account for the country’s past and colonial present, indicating also toward a perceived multi-ethnic future.

In the context of the empire exhibitions, otherwise obscure territorial entities such as Cyprus, previously unknown to British audiences, were given flesh and bones through their compact pavilions. Their architecture, the selection and curation of the show-pieces and artefacts guided the visitor’s experience. This experience could be direct through a visit to the pavilion, or indirect through the viewer’s interaction with visual reproductions of the pavilions in the press, through engravings and, later on, photographs.²⁹ The following excerpt from *The Queen*, published on 2 October 1886, serves as evidence: ‘Perhaps there is no court in the Exhibition more interesting than that of Cyprus. Its modern products, as well as its relics of ancient times, have a strange fascination for the thoughtful observer.’³⁰

26 CSA, SA1: 1191/1926/1, Cyprus Trade Comm. in London to Cyprus Colonial Secretary, 8 December 1927, 62-63.

27 A. E. Coombes, ‘The Franco-British Exhibition: Packaging Empire in Edwardian England’, *The Edwardian Era*, eds. J. Beckett and D. Cherry (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1987), 154.

28 Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 9; Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, 17-18.

29 J. Robinson, ‘Introducing Pavilions: Big Worlds Under Little Tents’, *Open Arts Journal*, Vol. 2, No.4 (2013), 1-22, 4.

30 Cited in R. H. Lang, *Report (with three woodcuts) upon the results of the Cyprus representation at the Colonial & Indian Exhibition of 1886* (Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1886b), 35.

The visual and written resources accommodated in the pavilion served also as a mechanism of control, not necessarily a literal and obvious physical control over Cypriots but, more importantly in this case, control over Cyprus’s culture. Cyprus was therefore ‘both possessed and contained’ in the physical space of the pavilion, whose decorations, fine art objects and other artefacts effectively compiled and offered a concise visual dictionary of this country’s mythology, history and present.³¹ For example, the 13 banners found in the 1886 pavilion were arguably suitably utilised by the organising committee to reaffirm Britain’s ruling status over Cyprus. (See Figure 2, next page)

The banners, prepared and hand-painted ‘in an economical, artistic and characteristic manner’ by the wife of the Assistant Commissioner, G. Gordon Hake, hovered over visitors, referencing the island’s tumultuous past by offering a memorable pictorial narration.³² The head of the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the head of Jupiter Ammon, both from Cyprian coins of the sixth century B.C. were seen next to a Lion, inspired from a Phoenician coin of the fifth century B.C.³³ The ‘Crux Ansata’ (cross with a handle), copied from a Cyprian coin of the fifth century B.C., occupied the same space with a banner presenting the Eagle of the Ptolemies, from a coin of Ptolemy I, who conquered Cyprus in 311 B.C. A Byzantine Emperor, inspired by a coin of the empire of the East, to which Cyprus belonged until 1191 A.D., hung next to St. George and the Dragon representing the conquest of Cyprus by Richard Coeur de Lion of England in 1191 A.D. Escutcheon of Luzignan Kings, who reigned over Cyprus between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries A.D., gave way to the Lion of St. Mark, the emblem of the Republic of Venice, to which the island belonged from 1489 to 1571 A.D. The recent past of Cyprus was represented by the Crescent and Star, emblem of the Ottoman empire, which conquered Cyprus in 1571. This was followed by V.R. under a crown, from when Cyprus was ceded to Queen Victoria by Sultan Abdul Hamid under the terms of the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1878. Finally, the banner of the High Commissioner of Cyprus completed the collection and firmly placed the visitor in the colonial present.³⁴

A tableau of the country’s history was therefore exhibited through the selection of a collection of images from antiquity to modernity. At the same time, a pluralistic Cypriot identity, primarily Christian and Muslim, was introduced to the visitor. This identity was moderated, curated and controlled by a third one, the British. Several paintings, for example, depicting churches and monasteries of Cyprus, such as the church of Saint Sophia, inevitably evoked a distinctively Christian Orthodox aura,

31 Coombes, ‘The Franco-British Exhibition’, 154.

32 Lang, Report (with three woodcuts), 2.

33 Lang, *Handbook to Cyprus*, 19.

34 Ibid.

conveying the religion and the ethnic Greek background of the majority of the Cypriot population. These were made not by Cypriot artists but by Captain Sinclair and Tristram Ellis Esq., two British administrators serving at the time in Cyprus.

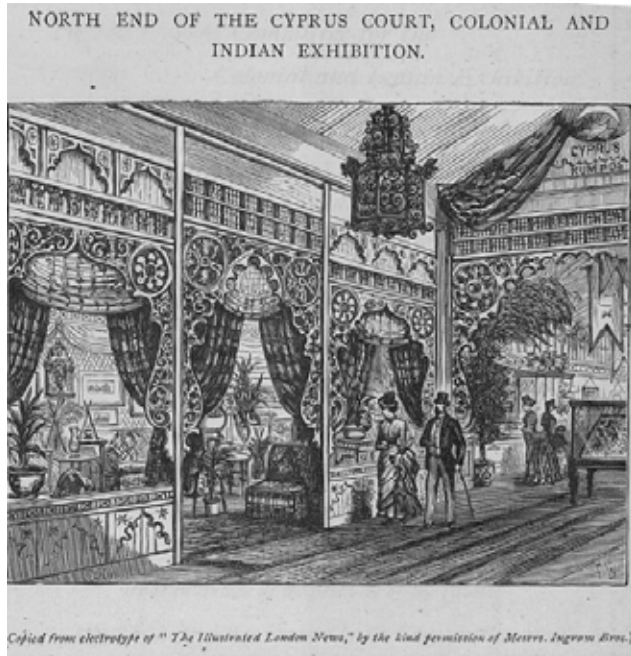


Figure 2: ‘North End of the Cyprus Court, Colonial and Indian Exhibition. Copied from electrotype of *The Illustrated London News*, by the kind permission of Messrs. Ingram Bros.’, R. H. Lang, *Report (with three woodcuts) upon the results of the Cyprus representation at the Colonial & Indian Exhibition of 1886* (Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1886).

The country’s Ottoman past was also present, found for example in a painting of a mosque, in the *berat* of the Sultan naming the Archbishop of Cyprus, and in the Turkish divans arranged behind wood-worked screens.³⁵ Another interesting decorative element of Cyprus’s 1886 participation, adding to this double identity, was the painted symbols of the Greek Orthodox Christian Cross and the Ottoman Star and Crescent found side by side on the pavilion’s windows. Decorations and paintings coexisted with other visual culture material and symbols deriving from the country’s colonial present, for example a photograph of the government house and the British

35 J. McCarthy, ‘Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian exhibition: a lecture delivered by John McCarthy and published for use in the schools of the island’, *Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection* (Manchester, 1887).

summer camps at mount Troodos. The ‘little’ Cypriot pavilion, as it was called in the British press of the time, was therefore considered to be ‘a perfect gem of an annexe in which the products and relics of Cyprus have been artistically grouped’, showing ‘the picturesqueness of this historically fascinating island’.³⁶

Apart from a multi-visual, there was also a multi-lingual representation of Cyprus, which effectively served also as a mechanism of colonial control. For example, above the northern entrance of the pavilion, one could read the inscribed name of the country in English, Turkish, and Greek. Furthermore, upon entering the pavilion, there was an inscription in ancient ‘Cyprian’ and Phoenician. In this manner, the country’s multi-ethnic past and present were explicitly referenced, affirmed and established.³⁷ Cyprus’s façade, in its literal and metaphorical sense, was repeated and confirmed over the years in its exhibition participations abroad. For example, in the case of the 1924 exhibition, the word ‘CYPRUS’ over the end of its pavilion which had a joint space with the Palestinian representation, was written again, in the following order, ‘in English, Turkish and Greek’.³⁸ Similarly, in the 1924 Palestinian Pavilion, the country’s heading was inscribed in Arabic, Turkish, Hebrew and English. In the Cyprus Commissioner’s understanding, this addition ‘would give a suitable Oriental character to the building’.³⁹ Through a diversity of visual media, a pluralistic identity for Cyprus, as well as for Palestine, was established.

This co-existence of diverse cultural elements was also put forward through written language. For example, in the descriptive text of the 1886 pavilion’s official catalogue, Cypriots were described as ‘Mahometans’ (Muslims) and ‘non-Mahometans’.⁴⁰ This terminology, casually introduced by the British committee to the uninformed reader of the catalogue, emphasised a de facto contradistinction between Cypriots of Greek and Turkish descent. The Christian Greek population inhabiting the island, covering at the time roughly 80% of the country’s population, was therefore largely dismissed with the use of the vague and unspecified description ‘non-Mahometans’, which effectively diminished them into something merely *other than* Muslims. This accentuated opposition between *the one and the other*, between Cypriots of Greek and Turkish heritage, was to put down roots in the years to come and would play a catalytic role in Cyprus’s modern history. A related example is the use of the signifier ‘non-Jewish communities’ in the text of the Balfour Declaration regarding the Mandate for Palestine, setting out the terms of British rule in the country, which effectively

36 *Times*, (1886, August 4-5), 28; *Illustrated London News*, (1886, October 10), in Lang, *Report (with three woodcuts)*, 32-33.

37 Lang, *Handbook to Cyprus*, 19; Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, 1-14.

38 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Comm. Bevan to Major Flinn, 23 October 1923, 147-156; Flinn to Bevan, 5 November 1923, 162-164.

39 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Flinn, 23 October 1923, 147-156.

40 Lang, *Handbook to Cyprus*, 14.

rendered the Arab presence in Palestine invisible.⁴¹ These examples add to a British imperial trend towards representing in this manner the ethnic/religious division in various empire territories.

On the State of the Art in Cyprus

No Cypriot was involved in the arrangements of the 1886 and 1942 pavilions, and no Cypriot artists exhibited their work there. All the artworks displayed were made by Britons. In 1886, decorations were arranged by Commissioner Lang, G. Gordon Hake and Captain Wisely, the two Assistant Commissioners. Ornamentations were made under the superintendence of Ernest Jessop, 'a gentleman of great artistic taste, and possessing an intimate knowledge of the decorative art'.⁴² Archival research on the 1886 exhibition has not revealed evidence testifying to the colonial government's attempts to identify Cypriot visual artists who would exhibit their artworks at the Cyprus pavilion. Therefore, we are left to assume that there were no such attempts. This assumption is enhanced by archival sources relating instead to the art section of the Cypriot pavilion of the 1924 exhibition, which confirm that no efforts were made on the part of the colonial government to promote and display the work of Cypriot artists. In May 1922, Cyprus's Chief Secretary received a circular letter, by Thomas C. Gotch, the President of the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists and member of the General Committee of the British Empire Exhibitions. Gotch was letting him know about the proposed Fine Art Section of the exhibition and was asking for his opinion regarding a possible representation of Cypriot fine and applied art exhibits. The Secretary plainly and unflinchingly replied that 'there are no Art Societies in Cyprus and that it is regretted that it is not practicable to furnish an art exhibit from this country'.⁴³

For the decorations of the 1924 pavilion, the Cyprus commissioner contacted instead various 'old Anglo-Cypriots who have pictures' in order to borrow a sufficient number for display.⁴⁴ He did so despite the fact that Thomas C. Gotch had suggested each of the colonies form a 'native' representative committee to select and organise its own exhibit in order to reflect the present state of 'its various Arts'.⁴⁵ A similar lack of support for the provisioning of local artists and artisans was shown in Cyprus's attached pavilion, that of Palestine. Its committee had plans to bring over Arab glassblowers, weavers, and potters, as well as Yemeni Jewish jewellers. However, these plans were eventually cancelled due to insufficient funds.⁴⁶

41 Roberts, *Palestine on Display*, 72.

42 Lang, *Report (with three woodcuts)*, 2.

43 CSA, SA1: M.P. 473/1919/1, 65.

44 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Flinn, 23 October 1923, 147-156.

45 CSA, SA1:M.P. 473/1919/1, 62.

46 Roberts, *Palestine on Display*, 83.

The issue regarding the visual arts of Cyprus recurred two years later, in 1924, when Alfred Yockney, the Assistant Director of the Applied Arts Committee of the Arts Council for the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, contacted Commissioner Bevan, asking him again for information in regard to the art of Cyprus. Yockney was to write an article on the art of the British Dominions and Colonies and was unable to find out ‘whether the art of Great Britain has in the least, influenced the native art or craft of Cyprus’, and also ‘details of the various native crafts’.⁴⁷ Eventually, Geoffrey Jeffery, Curator of Ancient Monuments Cyprus, was asked to write an article with his observations on the topic and forward it to Yockney.⁴⁸

Geoffrey Jeffery’s 14-page memorandum on ‘The British Colonial Occupation of Cyprus in 1878, and its Influence on the Indigenous Arts and Industries in the Island during the past half century’ was produced on 5 February 1924.⁴⁹ It had remained undiscovered in the Cyprus State Archives up until this point. The memorandum is of great significance as Jeffery gives there a vivid account on the then state of visual arts and crafts in Cyprus, including painting, sculpture, woodcarving, pottery, architecture, furniture, embroidery and fashion. The document is unique in its content and crucial in the attempt to trace a modern history of visual art and culture in Cyprus. It also offers a window on the colonial government’s approach to and perception of the arts in Cyprus under the first half of British rule. This memorandum is also significant because it contradicts the colonial government’s statements about the country’s inability to ‘furnish’ the exhibition with ‘an art exhibit from this country’.⁵⁰ It is worth quoting Commissioner Bevan’s reply to the Chief Secretary regarding Jeffery’s memorandum, which is typical of the colonial government’s ignorance regarding the colony’s cultural life and production, but more importantly, its lack of interest in rectifying this. Bevan wrote: ‘The article on Cyprus art might not inappropriately begin like a book upon, “Snakes in Ireland”, which commenced “There are no snakes in Ireland”!’⁵¹

The prevailing unmodernised (cultural) conditions in Cyprus, but also the colonial government’s inactivity in introducing a cultural policy of Western European standards for modernising the country’s cultural environment, affected and even discouraged the Cypriot artists’ and craftsmen’s participation in the exhibition of 1924, the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, and arguably in other empire exhibitions. Nevertheless, lacking a cultural policy for Cyprus did not mean lacking Cypriot artistic production. Jeffery’s Memorandum confirms this.

Jeffery was eager to give credit to the British for attempting to, as he thought,

47 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Yockney to Bevan, 23 January 1924, 266a.

48 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Cyprus Chief’s Secretary Office, 1 February 1924, 267.

49 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2.

50 CSA, SA1: M.P. 473/1919/1, 65.

51 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 1 February 1924, 267.

and largely succeeding in ‘convert[ing] the old world centre of the Levant into a mere province of modern Europe’.⁵² Jeffery observed that some of the ‘indigenous arts and crafts’ disappeared under the influence of modern ideas, such as native wearing apparel and carpet-making. Others, such as the art of dying silk, cotton and linen, he thought were not an important and promising industry in Cyprus. On the other hand, hand-made silk, lace embroidery, such as the Lefkara lace, and most importantly woodcarving for furniture were industries that possibly received a massive impulse from British rule as they had found a market. Nevertheless, Jeffery believed that British influence did not develop any novel or inventive talent: ‘[N]othing of a localised character is traceable in the innumerable copies of English designs for chairs, sideboards, hat-stands, etc.’⁵³

According to Jeffery, the ‘Cypriot artificer’ was ‘conservative’, still practicing industries such as hand-loom, lace-work and musical instruments, ‘in ways which are entirely obsolete in Europe’.⁵⁴ Therefore, Cyprus’s ‘backward’, as in unmodernised, state could be seen not only in the lack of modern industries and technological and agricultural equipment but, as argued in Jeffery’s memorandum, in the underdevelopment of the native arts and crafts. Jeffery however, seemed to acknowledge the fact that these conditions were difficult to change due to the absence of capital.

In his commentary on the graphic arts of painting, Jeffery explained that painting was confined to the religious pictures used in the Orthodox Church for religious purposes, and that there was a complete absence of decorative paintings in domestic spaces. He considered woodcarving as ‘par excellence the medium of Cyprus artistic aspirations’ and praised its authenticity as ‘a genuine art in the ancient sense’.⁵⁵ Pottery, he thought, as ‘almost identical in texture and design with that of prehistoric times’.⁵⁶ Jeffery gave considerable credit to the influence the British had on architecture in Cyprus, claiming that until they took over the island, architecture was ‘absolutely nil’, with some ruined buildings from the time of the Venetian occupation standing in contrast to the ‘plain unadorned edifices’ of the Ottoman age.⁵⁷

Jeffery’s 1924 memorandum on the native arts and crafts of Cyprus is a unique source of information through the British point of view, helping us today to shape an idea of the then prevailing cultural conditions and emerging trends in the country. By and large, Jeffery typifies Cypriot artists and artisans as ‘conservatives’, who used ‘obsolete’ methods of production, lacked an identifiable artistic identity and who had to be further educated and trained in the British western style in order to enter a

52 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 13.

53 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 13.

54 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 1924, 1.

55 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 1924, 4.

56 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 1924, 13-14.

57 CSA, SA1: 473/1919/2, 1924, 7.

modern European cultural era.

Photographs, Post-Cards, Films and Human Exhibits

Even though Cypriot artefacts were not showcased in the 1886 and 1924 exhibitions, nevertheless some other objects of visual culture were showcased, for example photographs. These were hung on the walls showing views of Cyprus such as ‘a field of Flax, some orange and pomegranate groves, Troodos, Government buildings, Othello’s Tower, Bellapais’.⁵⁸ Furthermore, 5000 packets of one set of picture postcards, each containing twelve views of Cyprus, were put on sale.⁵⁹ There were also thoughts of using a cinematographer for the projection of a descriptive film of Cyprus for its inclusion in the general exhibition of films from the empire, and also for its projection throughout Great Britain for educational purposes. There was even a suggested scenario written by Commissioner Bevan, however this venture was also abandoned due to financial constraints.⁶⁰ Once again, the Palestinian pavilion experienced similar issues with the Cypriot one, when a proposal made from the same filming company to show a film about life in Palestine, presenting ‘native craftsmen’ at work and large-scale models of religious sites, was rejected because Palestine’s exhibition committee was not prepared to support the venture financially.⁶¹

Even though Cypriot artists were absent from the 1886 and 1924 exhibitions, some Cypriots were nevertheless present in the 1924 exhibition, as human exhibits. Human exhibits were an important display of the empire exhibitions. Exhibition committees thought them to be one of the most effective visual media, having the ability and immediacy to reach out to a large audience of people and make an impression. Human exhibits were thought to bring out ‘local colour’ and to add to the ‘reality and interest’ of the colonial pavilions.⁶² Cypriot identity was therefore, further typified and simplified through the visual medium of the ethnographic exposition. In the 1886 exhibition, a family of five (three women and two men), were brought from Cyprus to London, dressed both in Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot traditional attire and preoccupied in the traditional activity of weaving silk on a loom.

As Commissioner Lang wrote, this live performance of human exhibits attracted ‘universal interest’ and created an immediate impression on the visitors who, in their majority, saw for the first time these ‘attractive’, ‘sympathetic’ and ‘interesting people’.⁶³ The idea was that Cypriot human spectacles conveyed ‘a more just and true notion

58 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Flinn, 29 October 1923, 174-177.

59 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Flinn, 19 November 1923, 197-200.

60 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Flinn, 29 October 1923, 174-177.

61 Roberts, *Palestine on Display*, 82-83.

62 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Bevan to Flinn, 17 October 1923, 134-141.

63 Lang, *Report (with three woodcarvings)*, 3.

of Cyprus than could have been otherwise communicated'.⁶⁴ The Commissioner claimed that the benefit was mutual, because not only did the British public gain a better knowledge of Cyprus but the Cypriot live specimens 'carried away with them to their homes and friends, a more sympathetic appreciation of the Mother Country'.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, this remains unconfirmed and biased, since accounts on the Cypriot family's experiences do not exist and we rely only on the British commissioner's official report. In addition to live specimens, the pavilion also contained four life-size mannequins wearing dresses, chemises, and other traditional clothing of the native people of Cyprus.⁶⁶ Humans and mannequins therefore embodied 'various native types'.⁶⁷ There was another attempt to have Cypriot human exhibits at the 1924 exhibition, showing a continuation in the British way of colonial exhibiting almost 40 years after the 1886 exhibition. Commissioner Bevan repeatedly urged the colonial government to send a chair maker from the village Lapithos to perform his craft in front of the visitors. He also requested a man to show the Cypriot craft of silk reeling with boiling water. However, these ideas were not realised 'chiefly for reasons of space and expense'.⁶⁸ (See Figure 3)

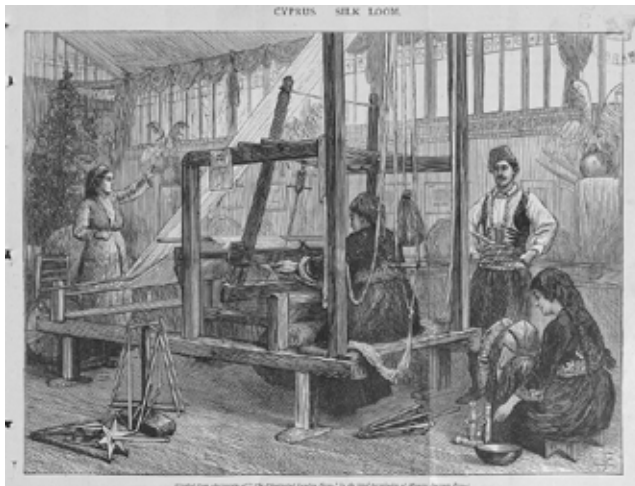


Figure 3: 'Cyprus Silk Loom. Copied from electrotype of *The Illustrated London News*, by the kind permission of Messrs Ingram Bros.', R. H. Lang, *Report (with three woodcuts) upon the results of the Cyprus representation at the Colonial & Indian Exhibition of 1886* (Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1886).

64 Lang, *Report (with three woodcarvings)*, 3.

65 Lang, *Report (with three woodcarvings)*, 3.

66 Lang, *Handbook to Cyprus*, 34.

67 Lang, *Handbook to Cyprus*, 19.

68 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Comm. Bevan to Major Flinn, 29 October 1923, 174-177; Flinn's reply, 14 November 1923, 192-194.

Architecture: Cyprus and Palestine, a Shared Space

Expense and space were also the reasons why in 1924 Cyprus shared its exhibition space with Palestine, occupying one-third of it. It was impossible for each colony, dependency and protectorate to have its own pavilion. Therefore, participations were arranged in groups, for example the Eastern group and the West African group. Cyprus was part of the Mediterranean group, together with Malta and the Mandate for Palestine. The rationale behind this grouping was to make it possible to embody in the style of architecture and the laying-out of the surrounding grounds, characteristic features of the territories in the group. These features were supposed to enhance the effect of their exhibits.⁶⁹

In as much as the empire exhibitions formed a territorial unit, showcasing the British empire, they were more evidently ‘a cultural jigsaw’.⁷⁰ This could be observed in the diverse and numerous colonial participations placed side by side, effectively forming the British empire in miniature, but also often within the confines of a single participation. In 1924, Cyprus was accommodated in a building set up by Palestine, in spite of Cyprus’s Chief Secretary’s hesitation about joining a larger and competitive country, because there was the distinct possibility of ‘dominating our exhibits’ and being ‘completely swamped by Palestine’.⁷¹ This fear derived from the fact that the neighbouring country was also a producer of wines and fruits. Unfortunately, many of the exhibition visitors entering the 1924 pavilion failed to realise when they had passed from Palestine to Cyprus, despite the attempts of Cyprus’s staff to mark the distinction, for example through the curation of the exhibits. (See Figure 4, next page)

In contrast to the Palestine pavilion, whose importance, as argued by Fuchs and Herbert, was in specifically inviting an architectural portrait of the island, Cyprus, at least from an architectural point of view, did not succeed in doing this.⁷² The pavilion as a building was of a predominantly Palestinian character.⁷³ It consisted mainly of an elongated hall, flanked by arcaded aisles, and roofed by a metal and glass roof. The hall terminated at each end in a domed turret-like vestibule of oriental inspiration. The exterior was painted white with horizontal dark stripes evoking Syrian *ablaq* work.⁷⁴

69 CSA, SA1:473/1919/1, Circular despatch 15 March 1922, 39-44.

70 Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 114.

71 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Cyprus Acting Chief Secretary to Cyprus Representative, Mediterranean Group BEE Committee, 33; Flinn to Michell, 6 June 1923, 65.

72 R. Fuchs and G. Herbert, ‘Representing Mandatory Palestine: Austen St. Barbe Harrison and the Representational Buildings of the British Mandate in Palestine, 1922-37’, *Architectural History*, Vol. 43, No. 309, (2000), 281-333, 309.

73 CSA, SA1:473/1919/2, Minutes of the third Meeting of the Mediterranean Group Committee, 7 March 1923, 37.

74 Fuchs and Herbert, ‘Representing Mandatory Palestine’, 308.

Cyprus's section was largely 'eclipsed by her larger neighbour', making it impossible to stage an advantageous show for its exhibits.⁷⁵



Figure 4: 'Cyprus Pavilion, British Empire Exhibition, Wembley' 1924 (Look and Learn, www.lookandlearn.com).

Conclusion

In 1923, Major E. A. Belcher wrote about the advantages of the British Empire Exhibition of 1924. One of them, he said, was that it gave the opportunity to the British people who could not travel around Europe to get 'the next best thing at the Exhibition, and see with their own eyes something of the products, activities and even social life of each part of this great Empire'.⁷⁶ British colonial governments and their exhibition committees intended to exhibit to the British public an image of their colony, dependency or mandate that was 'next best' to the real thing, which was nothing else but to visit these territories. Nevertheless, as seen from Cyprus's case in the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, these participations conformed primarily to a British colonial agenda, often deviating from the prevailing conditions in the respective country.

As it has been established through this discussion, an image for Cyprus was assembled and transmitted through the use of various visual resources such as cultural artefacts, fine art works and ephemeral material, as well as written resources.

75 CSA, SA1:473/1919/1, W. Bevan, 'Cyprus at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924-1925: Brief Review', 292.

76 E. A. Belcher, 'The Dominion and Colonial Sections of the British Empire Exhibition 1924', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol.71, No. 3674 (20 April 1923), 388.

These were gathered, commissioned and produced by exhibition committees, usually comprising British officials serving in the country, who mostly through a combination of arrogance, ignorance and indifference dismissed the Cypriot local input and view of the country. A Cypriot identity, if not persona, admittedly containing characteristics of the Cypriot people, such as religion, ethnicity and customs, was nevertheless a manufactured product, promoted through an imperial gaze. Cyprus’s projected image would serve the British colonial interests, and would arguably keep the colony under control, possessed and contained, not only in the space of these pavilions, but perhaps more importantly within its actual geographical space.

Cyprus’s participations in the exhibitions of 1886 and 1924 were made possible under adverse circumstances which resulted from financial obstacles, the country’s and its people’s unmodernised state, and the colonial government’s inability, unwillingness and often indecision in whether it should invest in the country. Nevertheless, the ‘phenomenal ignorance’, as it has been called, of the majority of the visitors to these exhibitions, regarding the location, administration, climate, resources and culture of Cyprus, was relatively dispelled because of the diverse exhibits accommodated in its pavilions. In the words of the 1924 commissioner: ‘Wembley has made Cyprus known’.⁷⁷ Arguably, the main result of Cyprus’s participations in the empire exhibitions abroad was not so much trade development and profit as it was originally intended, but instead a relative publicity that placed the image of Cyprus, so far unknown to the majority of the British public, on the map of the British empire’s territorial acquisitions.

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77 CSA, SA1:473/1919/1, Bevan’s Review, 6 October 1925, 287.

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