

Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict

ALEXIS RAPPAS

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Alexis Rappas' book on British Colonial rule in Cyprus makes a remarkable contribution to a rather neglected time period of modern Cypriot history, that of the interwar years and more specifically the 1930s. Indeed, most researchers working with the history of Cyprus and the Cyprus issue begin their narration from the 1950s, whereas Alexis Rappas tries to reproduce the 1930s in order to highlight the conditions that led to the outbreak of the Cyprus conflict. And he succeeds by covering various social and political issues that shaped Cypriot society on the eve of the events that led to independence and partition of the island.

The book comprises six chapters. The introductory chapter covers the revolt of October 1931 and its aftermath, the response of the colonial government and the consolidation of an authoritarian rule that lasted for decades. What is really interesting in this chapter is the view of the colonial government in regard to the riots, which leads the reader to the second chapter, entitled 'The Three Pillars of Arcadian Cyprus: Experiments in Social Engineering'. In my opinion, this is the book's most fascinating chapter due to the analysis of the colonial government's policies towards the political elite after the 1931 riots. Rappas analyses the main characteristics of *Palmerocracy* and the attempts to restruct the colonial administration in Cyprus by imposing tighter control on education and agriculture to minimize Greek and Turkish influence on school curricula on the one hand and relieve farmers from their dependence on usurers. Rappas rightly names this policy 'social engineering' and puts emphasis on Palmer's effort to turn Cypriots away from politics and the ambitious yet ill-fated determination to introduce Cypriotness.

The third chapter under the title 'Rituals of Bureaucratic Governance' offers a quite interesting review of the British colonial administration and the approach of the administrators towards Cypriots but also towards the governor himself. This chapter describes eloquently the attitude of the British bureaucrats regarding their tasks and also in relation to Governor Palmer, who was fiercely criticized even by members of the colonial administration (pp. 66-67). In this chapter we also find information about the nature of the colonial administration in relation to the representation of the two communities. This is achieved with a reference to an incident of a dismissal of a police officer serving in the village of Kolossi, in Limassol. The reports of the police officer

himself and the inspectors in the police department describe how bureaucratic issues regarding native personnel were tackled. Finally, emphasis is put on the detachment of the British bureaucrats who would spend years serving the colonial administration without intermingling with the local population.

In the fourth chapter, entitled 'The Constitutionalist Movement and the Avenues of Politicization', the author describes the failed, yet crucial, attempts of members from various political and social classes, comprising both Turkish and Greek Cypriots, to pressure the colonial government to restore constitutional liberties. It is interesting that this mobilized not only the Greek and Turkish Cypriot political elite but also members and sympathizers of the Cypriot left in London. Focus is put on the role of the coffee houses, traditionally a place of socialization and politicization for Cypriots regardless of ethnic or religious background. It was in the coffee houses where various petitions to the government were circulated and signed. What I found quite fascinating is the account of the government's reaction and the attempts to delegitimize the movement in favour of the restoration of the constitution.

The fifth chapter, under the title 'The Orthodox Church and the Displacement of the Public Sphere', deals with the ill-fated policy of the Colonial Administration to curb the Cypriot Church's influence on local politics using as an excuse the 'Archiepiscopal Question'. Rappas offers a fresh approach to an issue that has been thoroughly investigated; he connects the church's role in local politics with the absence of any kind of political representation after 1931 in order to present the church as an 'autonomous public sphere', which justifies the politicization of the Archiepiscopal Question and answers the question why did the colonial administration fail to control and limit the church's influence. The Church of Cyprus survived under the British because of its dual role 'as an institution the church's activity was "public"; but it presided over a matter, the Cypriots' faith, which is successfully presented as private and, thereby to be preserved from state intervention' (p. 150).

Finally, the sixth chapter, entitled 'The Labour Question: Political Stakes in a Battle of Denominations', deals with the labour movement and how it managed to introduce new social jargon, the notions of working class and labour, into everyday language. The colonial administration did not acknowledge the labour movement in Cyprus, but through the role of trade unions, as they are depicted in the miners' strike of 1936 and the Famagusta Cotton Factory strike of 1938 the issue of the workers' rights became an issue that affected both communities and was covered in depth by the press. This success can be witnessed even today in the role of trade unions in both communities. It created a new public sphere that allowed for the workers' rights and needs to be expressed and heard, but at the same time it did not succeed to unite Greek and Turkish Cypriot workers under AKEL, given that the vast majority of Turkish Cypriot workers remained uninvolved.

Alexis Rappas' monograph is a valuable addition to the historiography of Cyprus because, through the analysis of diverse yet interconnected social and political issues of the neglected 1930s, it manages to underline the reasons for the repeated failures of the following decades to make Cyprus a common space for both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The attempt of the Colonial Government to depoliticize the Cypriot society after the 1931 riots is to blame for this failure. Rappas offers an invaluable approach to the Cypriot 1930s, a decade that, due to the ban on politics imposed by the Colonial Government, gives the impression that 'nothing really happened'.

YIANNIS MOUTSIS

