

Makarios: The Revolutionary Priest of Cyprus

DEMETRIS ASSOS

London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2018

pp. 286

ISBN 978-1-78831-203-5

Books on Makarios per se are few and far between, especially in English, and Assos' study is a useful, well set out and coherent account and explanation, with a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The title is, however, a bit of a misnomer: a more accurate one would be Makarios' Ten-Year Struggle for Cyprus, which is what the book is really about. The author appears to have relied to some extent particularly on Robert Holland's (his Ph.D. supervisor) *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*,¹ Stanley Mayes' *Makarios: A Biography*,² and Stephen Xydis' *Reluctant Republic*.³ That being said, let us look more closely at the book's many strong points, and then at the few weaker ones.

First, the book helps the reader to appreciate the immense problems that Makarios faced, and also analyses well the Steppenwolfish relationship between the priest and the politician. Second, Assos is correct when he writes (p.3) that it was Makarios' drive and determination which launched the 'internationalisation' of the Cyprus Question as a means of applying pressure on an intransigent Britain. The account that follows shows this par excellence. Third, Chapters One and Two provide the reader with thoughtfully presented —and necessary— background on Cyprus' religion and politics, and on Makarios himself, before 1950. Fourth, Assos draws our attention to Makarios attacking communism, from a Christian viewpoint (p. 20), thus ridiculing by default a later American description of him as 'the Red priest'. Fifth, he skilfully juxtaposes Makarios' 'purist' rival, the Bishop of Kyrenia, Kyprianos, with the subtle and diplomatic archbishop, thus shedding light on some of the petty backbiting with which Makarios had to cope. Sixth, he explains,

¹ Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

² Stanley Mayes, *Makarios: A Biography* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981). He relies more on interviews and secondary sources than documents. But Assos' book adds credence to Mayes' book.

³ Stephen G. Xydis, *Reluctant Republic* (London: Mouton & Co., 1973).

analyses, and evaluates the tensions between Makarios and the Greek governments (bringing out the weakness of the latter), particularly regarding Karamanlis. It seemed at various moments that the Cypriot tail was wagging the Greek dog. Seventh, Britain's intransigence comes across as a major factor in Greek attitudes, just as Washington's pressure on London to release Makarios from exile does, although Assos might have made more of Britain's having to hand over its leadership role in the Eastern Mediterranean (and Middle East) to America, after the Suez debacle of 1956. Eighth, Assos explains well the tensions between the rumbustious Grivas and the more moderate Makarios. This connects to Makarios' insistence that Grivas' EOKA should not kill people but restrict its activities to sabotage and diplomacy. This did not prove to be the case, but Grivas certainly had to be careful not to overstep the mark. Ninth, Chapter Five effectively explains the semantic gyrations of the British in negotiating with Makarios, along with Grivas' undermining of the archbishop's diplomacy, if not expressly, then surely by default. Tenth, the *pièce de résistance* of the book is surely Chapter Eight, where Makarios has to bite the bullet, and succumb to 'the least bad solution' (in Makarios' words), namely 'independence'. It reads almost like a tense thriller, and, given Assos' background to Makarios in Chapter Two, the pages almost become palpable.

So much for the positive aspects of the book. There are however a small number of inadequacies which must be mentioned.

First, Assos should also have used Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) in his research. This explains why he forbore to mention that the US simply wanted a solution that would not weaken NATO, and that was of course to ensure that Britain kept part of Cyprus for its military. As US worry about the Soviet Union increased, so did Washington's pressure on 'post-Suez Britain'. Second, on page 76, we read that the British officials had to cajole the Turkish government into taking a firm stance over Cyprus. This is indeed true, but there was rather more to it than that. To give a properly full picture, Britain helping Turkey with its propaganda needs to be demonstrated. Herewith two telling quotes:

'First, Turkish representatives abroad, particularly in London and Washington, might be more active in their publicity about the Turkish attitude to Cyprus. In the United Kingdom, their efforts might be directed (in this order) to: a) Members of Parliament, b) the weekly press (they have already been helped by the journalists' visit last year). The same appears to be true in the United States and other countries. Turkish propaganda should however be presented with

tact. For example, the Turkish Press Attaché in London has done no good by distributing leaflets of the ‘Cyprus is Turkish’ Association.’⁴

‘Our attitude to this question [Cyprus] is that we wish to assist the Turks as much as possible with the publicity for their case, but must at the same time be careful not to appear to be shielding behind them and to be instigating the statements.’⁵

In the above connexion, the fateful British-instigated 1955 conference has not been dealt with fully enough. Again, a quote by the Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office serves well:

‘I have always been attracted by the idea of a 3 Power conference, simply because I believe that it would seriously embarrass the Greek Govt. And if such a conference were held, I should not produce any British plan or proposal until a Greek-Turkish deadlock has been defined.’⁶

Similarly, although Assos makes Britain’s attitude clear, he does not mention that bringing Turkey into the equation was a breach of Article 16 of the Treaty of Lausanne, which stipulated that Turkey renounce all rights over any territory beyond its frontiers.

A final criticism: although in Chapter Eight, Assos writes that Rauf Denктаş admitted many years later that the bomb that exploded in June 1958 at the Turkish Government Information Bureau was the work of Turkish agents, he had in fact admitted it at the time, to the British Governor, Hugh Foot, who wrote:

‘All the evidence at present available regarding the bomb incident at the Turkish Press Counsellor’s house suggests that this was staged by Turks as a pretext for the subsequent arson and rioting. It is most unlikely that Greeks would deliberately precipitate trouble at this juncture by an attack on Turkish Government premises. The explosive in the bomb was of a kind which had been used in the past in bombs found in the possession of Turks but we have no record of this material being used by Greeks. The placing of the bomb suggests that

⁴ ‘Bowker to Young’ (15 February 1955) letter, PRO FO 371/117625, file RG 1081//120, in William Mallinson, *Cyprus, A Modern History* (London and New York: I.B. Taurus 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2012) 22.

⁵ Cox to Fisher (13 July 1956) letter, FO 953/1694, file G 11926/23, in *ibid.* 28. The FO 953 series relates to the FO’s then propaganda department, Information Research Department. Neither Assos nor his doctoral supervisor have listed this important series in their bibliographies.

⁶ Kirkpatrick to Nutting (26 June 1955) memorandum, PRO FO 371/17640, file RG 1081/535.

it was not intended to do any real damage. There is also the fact that no-one was inside at the time. The Press Counsellor had gone with the Turkish Consul-General and Denktash to attend a Turkish Youth meeting in Larnaca and this must have been known to Turks in Nicosia.⁷

To add to this, the Governor then wrote:

‘The four Turkish leaders were obviously shaken by the events of the night. They did not attempt to deny to me that the bomb at the house of the Turkish Press Councillor [sic] had been put there by Turks (though they said that they could not admit this publicly).⁸

Although the Governor knew of Turkish responsibility for the riots, he does not mention this in his memoirs, presumably because he was not allowed to release secret and top-secret information. This is a shame, since it gave a warped and incomplete picture until the documents were released some seven or so years ago.

Assos’ thesis was awarded in 2009, and is a good account, analysis, and evaluation of ten vital years. It appears, however, that neither his supervisor nor he were aware of the documents that I have referred to above, perhaps because the latter is more au fait with Colonial Archives than Foreign Office ones, which explains the occasional documentary lacuna.

Assos’ book ends with the apposite adage: ‘Those who write history have the gift of revision, while those who make it get only one chance’. To this A. J. P. Taylor’s words can be added: ‘A historian must not hesitate even if his books lend aid and comfort to the Queen’s enemies [...], or even to the common enemies of mankind.’⁹ His book is backed up by a host of original sources that don’t leave much space for revision, but rather shed extra light on a personality who has remained somewhat enigmatic. It is healthily devoid of IR theory with its often intellectually suffocating models and paradigms.

As Assos writes, his book is based on his doctoral dissertation. Had he had time to visit the British archives in the nine years between the award of his doctorate

⁷ Governor to Secretary of State, telegram 744, June 1958, FCO 141/3848.

⁸ Ibid., Governor to Colonial Office, repeated to Ankara and Athens, 8 July [sic] 1958, telegram no. 751. Although the Governor, Hugh Foot, knew of Turkish responsibility for the riots, he does not mention this in his memoirs, presumably because he was not allowed to release secret and top-secret information. This is a shame, since it gives a warped and incomplete picture. See also my two-part article in *Ο Φιλελεύθερος* of 4 and 5 May 2014.

⁹ Alan J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1964) 8-9.

and the publication of his book, the latter would, however, have been considerably enhanced. It is nevertheless a solid book that should be read by those interested in those vital ten years, and who may still be wondering whether Makarios should have accepted Harding's proposals.

I end this review with a quote by the British High Commissioner to Cyprus, with which Assos might agree:

'Makarios has the intellectual abilities, which would enable him to make his mark in a country of a hundred times the population. His mind is both clear and agile. He is a good psychologist and, although he sometimes cannot keep back a trace of arrogance, he is good at managing men [...] For a Greek, he is astonishingly undeviating [...] I do not believe that he ever told me a deliberate lie [...] perhaps because he thinks such a thing beneath him.'

William Mallinson