

# **One for all, Sylvain Béraud and the Latins of Cyprus [Unus pro omnibus, ο Sylvain Béraud και οι Λατίνοι της Κύπρου]**

**Dr Iosif Hadjikyriakos**

**Press and Information Office**

**Nicosia, 2021 [pp. 99]**

**ISBN: 978-9963-50-534-0**

According to Article 2 § 3 of the Constitution, the Armenian, Maronite and Latin minorities are classified as ‘religious groups’, all of which opted by a referendum, held on 13 November 1960, to belong to the Greek-Cypriot community. The Latins (Roman Catholic Cypriot citizens of European or Levantine descent) are the smallest religious group in number (about 2,500 persons) and the newest, chronologically, on the island.

The first origins of the Latin community can be traced back to 1126. During the Frankish (1192-1489) and the Venetian (1489-1570) Eras, considerable numbers of Catholics from Europe, Cilicia and the Levant settled in Cyprus, both secular and members of various religious orders; their long presence on the island left an indelible mark, such as the Franco-Byzantine architectural style, the Italo-Byzantine iconographical style, religious and administrative buildings, defensive works, dialectal words, village names, toponyms, etc.

As a result of the Ottoman conquest (1570-1571), the Latin population of the island perished, as they were either massacred or exiled, and their churches were turned into mosques. Despite the harsh oppression and onerous taxation during the Ottoman Era (1571-1878), religious and secular Latins did manage to return and establish themselves in Cyprus, mostly in Larnaca and Nicosia, although some eventually either became assimilated with the Greek Orthodox majority or were coerced into Islamisation.

With the arrival of the British, in 1878, came improved administration and religious tolerance, allowing Cypriots to prosper throughout the British Era (1878-1960). The Latin community was enlarged with Britons, Europeans, some Maronites, and even Catholic Armenians who arrived here as a result of the massacres and the Genocide. Furthermore, new religious and educational institutions were established in Nicosia, Larnaca, Limassol and Famagusta. Since 1960, the Latin community has



2017. The next publication on the Latins, this time by the House of Representatives, came out in 2020 in Greek, English and Italian versions, and was based on an exhibition that had taken place in Nicosia (2019) and Limassol (2020)<sup>11</sup>.

As part of its ongoing effort to promote awareness on the religious groups of Cyprus, in 2021 the Press and Information Office published two hard-cover, A4+ size volumes: *Unus pro omnibus, o Sylvain Béraud και οι Λατίνοι της Κύπρου (One for all, Sylvain Béraud and the Latins of Cyprus)* and *Αρμάνδος Τζιοζεφέν: 1931-2011 (Armando Josephin: 1931-2011)*. According to the PIO and the Latin Representative, Antonella Mantovani, these publications were prepared to highlight the centuries-old presence of the Latins in Cyprus, and also to enlighten readers about the Latin community, namely their origins, their contribution to Cyprus and their relations to the local society, of which they are an integral part.

The Béraud family, originally from La Ciotat township, to the southeast of Marseilles, France, has been linked with Cyprus since the late 17th century. Through his collection, as well as the family and personal stories recounted by distinguished professor Dr Sylvain Béraud (1933- ), the history and presence of the Latin-Cypriot community unfold in the pages of this volume, which has been carefully illustrated with maps, engravings and photographs from the archives of Dr Béraud and the Phivos Stavrides Foundation - Larnaca Archives.

After a brief introduction by Elengo Frangoulides, Acting Director of the PIO at the time, an introductory note by Antonella Mantovani, Latin Representative at the House of Representatives, and a preface by the author, Dr Iosif Hadjikyriakos, the volume continues with a brief reference to the re-constitution of the island's Latin community in the 17th century, initially in the coastal town of Larnaca/Scala, where - in addition to their commercial and consular activities - churches, monasteries and schools were established.

Later on, mention is made to the earlier presence of the Latins on the island, during the glorious Lusignan and Venetian Eras (1192-1489-1570), and their multifarious contribution to the mosaic of Cyprus, in a variety of fields: law, architecture, painting, music, commerce, etc. Concise briefing on the family's historical background is given, such as names, origins, socioeconomic statuses, professions and activities. Through descriptions and photographs, we may trace Dr Béraud's lineage and family connec-

---

<sup>11</sup> Research, Studies and Publications Service of the House of Representatives, *The Latins of Cyprus*. Government Printing Office: Nicosia, 2020.

tions, not limited to just the French, but also Italian, Levantine, Greek-Cypriot and Maronite-Cypriot.

Each photo tells another story and it also opens up a window linking Larnaca with the rest of Cyprus, as well as Cyprus with other places in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially Alexandria, Egypt, where Dr Béraud was born. Whereas older stories are part of the family tradition, newer ones are more personal and contemporary; these stories speak of emperors and kings, politicians and clergy, war and peace, happiness and sadness, the arts, letters and sciences, different customs, habits, morals and fashion trends. The visual material captures our imagination and allows us to travel back to different decades and centuries!

The concept of the identity of the Latin community is prevalent throughout the text, especially in relation to the overwhelming Orthodox majority in Cyprus. Even though there is usually tolerance, marrying a person of a different religious denomination can sometimes be problematic, especially with older family members, as it has been highlighted in parts of the book. The inevitable reality of assimilation is also touched upon, without judgement or criticism, as well as the sizeable influx of foreign Roman Catholics from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Africa in modern years. In fact, at the end of the book, and in his own handwriting, Dr Béraud concludes that the 1960 Latins are now part of history, as today's Latins are virtually indistinguishable from the rest of Cypriots, as a result of a '*great, total and irreversible cultural assimilation*', an ominous allusion to the all-levelling globalisation.

Larnaca is prominent throughout the text and across the various pictures, as a cosmopolitan town where, before the 1974 Turkish invasion, Greek-Cypriots, Turkish-Cypriots, Armenian-Cypriots, Maronite-Cypriots, Latin-Cypriots, Brits, Jews and Gypsies used to live and work together in harmony. Perhaps this is the volume's major weakness, namely that the Latin communities of Nicosia, Limassol and Paphos (and also pre-1974 Famagusta) have been somehow neglected. Conceivably, the PIO and the Office of the Latin MP plan on publishing other volumes on the subject, or maybe it was felt that Larnaca was to be given more prominence, as an effort to offset the emphasis that is often placed on Nicosia. Another oversight pertains to the absence of a structured family tree, in order to facilitate the reader while flicking through the texts and photographs of the various family members.

The pictures of various artefacts are fascinating, as they reveal a strong connection with the past and an excellent craftsmanship, back at a time when material objects were much more expensive, difficult to make and unique in appearance. Certificates

and medals are equally intriguing, being a tangible proof of the significance of Dr Béraud and his ancestors.

Even though the text has been written from a personal viewpoint, interesting facts and dates are also provided. After all, Dr Béraud has written numerous articles on the history of the Latin community of Cyprus; his doctoral thesis, titled *La culture française dans l'espace chypriote, de 1192 à 1971* (The French culture in the Cypriot space, from 1192 to 1971), was published in French by the Cultural Services of the Ministry of Education (1990), which also published it in Greek in 2008 (*Η γαλλική κουλτούρα στον κυπριακό χώρο, από το 1192 μέχρι το 1971*).

It is vital for more publications like this to be out there and to be readily available to students, researchers, scholars and every interested reader: for starters, they are a source of comprehensive and reliable information on the Latin-Cypriot community, and they address several questions about it; moreover, they can be used to raise awareness and also as the basis for articles, presentations, etc. on the subject and, why not, become a stepping-stone for further research. Learning about the multicultural mosaic that is Cyprus is a way of escaping from the monolithic ethno-religious approach on the history and culture of the island that has diachronically been promoted by various state, ecclesiastical, local and private agencies.

The volume was presented on 17 September 2021 at the Pattichion Municipal Museum - Historical Archive in Limassol, on 8 October 2021 at the Acropolis Park in Nicosia, and on 15 October 2021 at the House of Letters and Arts in Larnaca. Some of the material included in the volume was exhibited at the Centre of Visual Arts & Research in walled Nicosia, as part of the Francophonie celebrations for 2022: Open to the public between 18 March and 1 April 2022, the tribute to Dr Béraud was co-organised by the CVAR and the Consulate of Canada in Cyprus, and it included books, archives, photographs, memorabilia of the Latin community - all of which he donated to the CVAR - and also a short film.

Articles about the volume have appeared in newspapers, on web pages and on social media platforms. Its widespread promotion is essential: at any given time, a person searching about the minorities of Cyprus, or specifically the Latins, will come across some of these articles and, hopefully, they may decide to delve deeper, thus improving their existing knowledge and, perhaps, even enriching existing bibliography by producing new writings!

**Alexander-Michael Hadjilyra**