

# **Latsia: The Story of a Colony that Became a Metropolis**

## **[Λατσιά: Η Ιστορία μιας Αποικίας που έγινε Μητρόπολη]**

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In the course of just a few decades, Latsia, a village on the outskirts of Nicosia, became one of the city's largest suburbs. This book shows how this significant change came about. It tells a story of urbanisation in light of the rapid changes that led to the modernisation of the formerly largely agrarian Cypriot society. Unfortunately, it does so by using a somewhat dry and unengaging writing style, mostly limiting itself to a simple presentation of facts and figures and eschewing deeper analysis. Overall, the book would benefit from some deeper-level analysis and from a more sophisticated writing style.

Nevertheless, this is a noteworthy contribution to the fields of Cypriot studies and local history. The lack of secondary resources, which is noted in the introduction, is counterbalanced by the use of primary sources, mostly newspapers, as well as the inclusion of a wealth of photographic material. Oral interviews were also used: quotes are presented verbatim in the Cypriot dialect in order to preserve a sense of immediacy (in the end of the book there is a Greek-Cypriot glossary for readers who are not familiar with the Cypriot dialect).

The titular 'colony' of Latsia was established in the mid-19th century by citizens of Lythrodontas, a large village to the Southwest of Nicosia. Chapter 1 presents different theories on the origin of toponyms and discusses the area's landscape and geography. The area was chosen because it was rich in groundwater, which could be used for irrigation, and because of its proximity to Nicosia. Early inhabitants initially resided in the area periodically, so that they could be nearer to their fields for agricultural activities. In fact, according to census data and testimonies presented in Chapter 1, most permanent residents settled in the village much later, in the 1930s and 1940s. Other testimonies taken from memoirs and oral interviews with older members of the community describe the pre-industrial agricultural methods used in the early to

mid-20th century and the difficulties and hardships of life for farmers and agricultural labourers back then. The modernisation of agricultural processes after the end of World War II brought significant changes to economy and society. Chapter 4 addresses these changes and also other aspects of society and economy of Latsia, such as the origins and development of the cooperative movement.

Churchgoing is a central aspect of Cypriot social life. Therefore, the construction of new churches and the expansion or restoration of older church buildings were indicative of a community's development. The construction of schools was another indicator of urban development: Chapters 2 and 3 shows how population growth necessitated the foundation of new churches and new schools. Tables with the names of students and teachers record the development of school education in Cyprus during the 20th century, with the gradual increase of children enrolled at primary schools.

Chapter 5 is entitled '*Forms of Collective Action*', but, in essence, only focuses on the history of local sports associations. The prevalence of football clubs in the narrative is indicative of their social significance and their importance to local communities: football clubs provided an environment for socialisation and community organisation at a time when there was a lack of comparable alternatives.

The book includes a compelling narrative of the community's contribution to the Cypriot struggle for union with Greece, a movement which had massive support in Latsia. The narrative is spun through the use of firsthand testimonies, most notably from people who participated in the EOKA anti-colonialist armed struggle. Chapter 6 includes photographs of the ballots from the 1950 '*Enosis*' referendum, complete with all signatures, or, in some cases, simple crosses for people who were illiterate (who apparently accounted for 44.14% of the community).

The book also examines the political orientations of the citizens of Latsia. The results of all electoral contests are presented in Chapter 7. Differences such the reduction or increase in election results for different parties or candidates are, in most cases, noted or commented upon. However, no thorough interpretation of the results ensues, perhaps in an effort to steer clear of contemporary Cypriot politics.

Chapter 8 presents an account of the development of the community after the 1974 Turkish invasion. The arrival and settlement of hundreds of refugees in the area radically changed the human geography of Latsia. Before the initiation of a massive government housing project, refugees had to live under terrible conditions, often without access to basic services and amenities. Various concerns arose, relating to matters such as the lack of paved roads and sanitation in the refugee camps. The need

to respond to these challenges became the impetus for further development. In 1986, the village was large enough for it to be declared a municipality. The book ends with an account of the foundation of the Latsia Municipality, a reminder that this book reflects the interests and priorities of the Municipality, which supported the writer in his endeavour.

Overall, there is a lot of interesting information presented here, but it is rarely accompanied by deeper analysis. Brief accounts and simple presentation of historical data (e.g. lists of students, election results) are much more common throughout the book. It is worth noting however, that, in some cases, the style of presentation is effective (and affecting) in its simplicity. This is the case for example, in the presentation of the *'Enosis'* referendum lists or of the lists of schoolchildren and the testimonies from elderly women who were forced to leave school to help with agricultural operations and domestic work.

The book was likely conceived as an academic as well as a popular publication; it is most successful as the latter. This however, does not mean that it is not useful for historians and researchers interested in local history. Indeed, such studies are welcome contributions to an understudied field.

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