

The Evolution of the Political, Social and Economic Life of Cyprus, 1191-1950

Spyros Sakellaropoulos
Palgrave Macmillan
London, 2022 (pp. 336)
ISBN: 9783030918415

Spyros Sakellaropoulos, in his book *The Evolution of the Political, Social and Economic Life of Cyprus, 1191-1950*, has managed to offer a very well documented examination of the evolution of the political, social and economic life of Cyprus, from its conquest by Richard the Lionheart to the 1950 referendum on Enosis. As the author notes, there is a key element that characterises -and interprets- the interest in controlling the island: its particularly advantageous geographical position. Indeed, between Europe, Africa and Asia, Cyprus has always been an important centre for military and economic activities in the wider region. The conquests of Cyprus, as well as the constant interest that existed (and perhaps still exists) for the island, indicate its wider economic and geostrategic importance.

Although very important studies have been published on the Cyprus issue and Cyprus history in general, there was a lack of one that would attempt to approach its long-term evolution, using as key analytical tools its internal social contrasts in reference to the strategic position of Cyprus and the interest of many powerful powers in its annexation. Under this scope, from the conquest of the island by the Franks and onwards, a long historical period begins, during which the previous developments decisively influence the following ones. Spyros Sakellaropoulos offers this holistic approach and his book is a bird's view image of the main developments of this long period, effectively connecting them with the past and the future. For example, we would not be able to understand the strong role of the Orthodox Church under British rule without understanding its special position during the Ottoman rule.

This book explains how the economic, political and ideological transformations of the Cypriot society were caused by a combination of internal contradictions and external inflictions. In this context, some developments are clearer, such as why the Franks took over and then the Venetians, the particularity of the Ottoman administration, the role of the Church, the social inequalities of the first decades of the 20th

century, the role of the Turkish Cypriot elite especially until the end of the 40s, and many more.

As the author mentions in his conclusion, there are two very basic parameters that should be part of any attempt to make sense of the political, economic and social development of Cyprus over the centuries into something comprehensible. The first has to do with the island's geographical position and the interests of the great powers in each epoch. The second relates to the existence, from 1571 onward, of two communities which throughout the period of emergent modernism would begin to transform their religious specificities into a national identity, placing its seal on later intercommunal differences and making a decisive contribution to the dramatic developments of the 20th century's final decades.

Indeed, one of the book's strengths is its in-depth analysis of the complex relationship between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. Sakellaropoulos carefully traces the historical roots of these communities, their interactions, and how external forces contributed to the development of their distinct identities. This discussion is particularly relevant today, given the ongoing conflict in Cyprus and the unresolved division between the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot populations.

The book also sheds light on the economic history of Cyprus, emphasising the island's role as a trade hub and its economic ties to various empires. Sakellaropoulos explores the impact of economic activities, such as agriculture, mining, and trade, on the island's development. This economic perspective provides valuable insights into the factors that have shaped Cyprus' economic landscape over the centuries.

Furthermore, the author delves into the evolution of political institutions, examining the administration of Cyprus under different rulers. He highlights the challenges and tensions that arose as different powers sought to exert control over the island, offering a nuanced understanding of the political dynamics that have shaped Cyprus' history.

Spyros Sakellaropoulos' book is a testament to his rigorous research and scholarship. He draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including archival materials, historical accounts, and scholarly works. This extensive research allows him to provide a comprehensive and well-documented narrative of Cyprus' history. The author maintains a balanced perspective throughout the book, avoiding bias or favoritism towards any particular group or period. This objectivity is crucial in a historical work dealing with a region that has seen its fair share of conflicts and controversies. Given the ongoing disputes and political complexities surrounding Cyprus,

Sakellaropoulos' book offers valuable historical context and insights. It helps readers understand the deep-seated issues that continue to affect the island's political, social, and economic landscape.

While the book's length and level of detail may be daunting for some readers, its wealth of information and insights make it a worthwhile investment for those seeking a comprehensive understanding of Cyprus' historical journey. By exploring the intricate interplay of political, social, and economic forces over the centuries, Sakellaropoulos offers readers a profound perspective on the complexities and challenges that have shaped this island.

In an era when understanding the historical roots of conflicts and identities is of paramount importance, *The Evolution of the Political, Social, and Economic Life of Cyprus, 1191-1950* serves as a vital resource and a testament to the enduring relevance of history in our ever-changing world. Spyros Sakellaropoulos' work will undoubtedly continue to inform and inspire scholarship and dialogue surrounding the history and the future of Cyprus for years to come.

Alexis Alecou