

Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 9 (1994)

SYMMEIKTA: IN MEMORIAM OF D.A. ZAKYTHINOS 9A



Cypriot Culture during the Lusignan Period: Acculturation and ways of Resistance

Catherine ASDRACHA

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.761](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.761)

Copyright © 2014, Catherine ASDRACHA



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

ASDRACHA, C. (1994). Cypriot Culture during the Lusignan Period: Acculturation and ways of Resistance. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 9, 81-93. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.761>

CATHERINE ASDRACHA

CYPRIOΤ CULTURE
DURING THE LUSIGNAN PERIOD:
ACCULTURATION AND WAYS OF RESISTANCE

I would like to start this article repeating a very true remark with which Rudt de Collenberg began his lecture in the French Cultural Center of Nicosia, on April 27, 1982: «Often, he said, it is only toward the end of his/her work that a lecturer realizes that the title proposed is somehow not exactly appropriate to the subject treated; or that its chronological limits might somehow be changed»¹. This, in a way, is what happened also to me some days ago, so that now I feel I should point out the fact that this article will refer mainly to the attitudes of the Greek population of Cyprus in relation to the local French society and not the contrary, although this may seem at first rather curious, insofar as acculturation presupposes the interaction between at least two civilizations.

Having settled this point, let me now define acculturation and resistance as used in this paper. Acculturation is considered here as a cultural transfer and not as an intervention of one civilization trying to dismantle another. Consequently, resistance must be understood not as a cultural refusal, but as the limit of receptivity of the transferred civilization. In two words, we are dealing with contacts of a syncretic cha-

1. W. R. RUDT DE COLLENBERG, «Le déclin de la société franque de Chypre entre 1350 et 1450», *Κυπριακά Σπουδαι* 46 (1982), p. 71.

racter which, by their nature, presuppose that a possibility of reception preexists.

Anyhow, the cultural transfer is the contrary of an one way direction: the transmitter is at the same time the receiver of the cultural exchange. Under this condition, my point of view is not that which considers civilizations in conflictual, resisting or destructive relations, but two civilizations in a state of interpenetration. However, this mutual influence can not happen in all the levels where a transculturation is possible.

After these necessary explanations, let us see who the actors of the drama were: We could define them, *grosso modo*, as the representatives of the western and of the eastern civilizations, but this distinction would not be sufficient. In reality, during the period we are referring to, both worlds, the oriental and the western one, in Cyprus, were already the products of cultural mixtures; at the same time, they were also two worlds which were continuing their own cultural peculiarities. We must also point out that both of them participated in comparable civilizations, which means that the conditions governing the cultural process were alike. In spite of the fact that they had different religious references, Christian orthodox on the one side, Catholic on the other, they both shared the same faith, facing the «other» world, the oriental: Islam.

The oriental world of Cyprus was not exclusively composed of natives: Cilicians, Syrians, Armenians, Nestorians, Jews, and other minorities formed a multi-national but also socio-cultural kaledoscope. However, in spite of any dogmatic differences between them, the oriental populations and the latine population saw eye to eye in the matter of religion. As to the Latins in particular, their own civilization was already a product of mixtures; therefore they were by virtue ready to receive cultural loans. On the other hand, the western

world (predominantly French) which constituted the dominant society, was itself a world which had already gone through a process of cultural mixing in the various oriental countries where it had lived, for one or two centuries, before arriving in Cyprus.

Nevertheless, this French world represented a conquest imposed *manu militari*: it was a world which had transferred in Orient quasi purely western institutions, mainly the feudal system, with all the implied social hierarchies, economic foundations, juridical institutions and religious rituals. It was also an hierarchical, closed world, to which the local élites, the byzantine aristocratic families, had no access at the beginning. We are dealing here with the sphere of the main opposition between dominant class and subject population, which has been thoroughly analysed by Theodoros Papadopoulos in many of his works².

In Cyprus, the system of the Frankish conquest did not possess any of the flexibility it had displayed in Morea and other parts of Greece. This lack of comparative flexibility in the society of the conquerors determined the ways in which, in later years, a social osmosis was to take place in the upper level of the conquerant Frankish society, that is in the level of its feudal establishment.

It would be useful to remember, at this point, that the French society in Cyprus was mainly an urban society, not a rural one, in spite of the fact that its revenues were in great part of agricultural, indeed feudal, origin. We must also remember that this urban society was not exclusively feudal,

2. TH. PAPADOPOULLOS, *Chypre: frontière ethnique et socio-culturelle du monde byzantin* [= XV^e Congrès International d'Études Byzantines, Rapports et Co-rapports], Athens 1976, pp. 16-23; idem, «Unité et diversité dans l'histoire de Chypre», *Πρακτικά τοῦ Πρώτου Διεθνoῦς Κυπρολογικοῦ Συνεδρίου*, Γ/Α, Λευκωσία, 14-19 Ἀπριλίου 1969, Nicosia 1973, pp. 4-5; idem, «Frontier status and frontier processes in Cyprus», in *The Sweet Land of Cyprus*, ed. A. Bryer and G. Georghantides, Nicosia 1993, pp. 19-21.

but also commercial or based on small family industries. Moreover, last but not least, it comprised the administrative personnel, diverse and numerous, so necessary for the institutional structures (secular as well as ecclesiastical) to function.

Because of its nature, the space of urban society was more suitable for cultural osmosis. Of course, it was necessary that the populations living in the same place should come to contact and participate in the same social and institutional events, for a cultural osmosis to take place.

As we have already said, this interaction was difficult to happen inside the structures of the feudal society which constituted the exclusive space of the French aristocracy. On the other hand, we must have in mind that, in spite of the fact that this society was ruled by special laws, the Assizes, nevertheless, the native rural population which cultivated the land of the feudal domains continued the pre-frankish practices, insofar as the tax system governing these lands was concerned: in this way, neither society was completely exclusive, and the dominant one had already adopted forms from the pre-existing economic life. A proof of that is that we find in standardized texts, written in Greek, descriptions of the ways in which the *paroikoi* were taxed, ways of distribution, completely similar to what was valid in Byzantium³.

Anyhow, this continuation of the Byzantine system did not necessarily imply a participation of the natives in the dominant French strata; it simply strengthened its economic domination, while, parallel to that, it did not damage the acquired equilibrium among the agricultural world.

However, this closed stratum lost its consistency after 1350, for reasons connected to a demographic decrease, as

3. SP. LAMBROS (ἐκ τῶν Καταλοίπων), «Κυπριακὰ καὶ ἄλλα ἔγγραφα», *NE* 15 (1921), pp. 344-347, nos. 66-68.

has very well been indicated⁴. As a result of this process, non-French families entered into the dominant class, yet, not all the new families were accepted in the aristocracy.

A good example of social osmosis is the case of Helena Palaiologina, a powerful representative of the Byzantine imperial aristocracy. We must remember that such phenomena of mutual cultural interaction take place especially within royal courts, quite open to imitation. On the other hand though, we must not forget that Palaiologina was herself a product of mixtures, resulting from the matrimonial strategies of the Byzantine aristocracy. Though she is a daughter of Theodore II, despote of Morea, her mother is a Malatesta⁵.

In the political as in the religious sphere, the possibilities of cultural contacts were defined by the type of the conquest. They, too, were due to pre-frankish situations which suggested cultural osmosis, because the Cypriot Church belonged to the sphere of the patriarchate of Antiocheia. Anyhow, after the conquest, the Orthodox Church lost both its economic basis, and its power. This event acted in two ways: primo, towards a withdrawal, secundo, towards an attitude favorable to intergrations, which are highly characteristic of an acculturation, both religious and feudal. In two words, we can say that the situation was favorable for a process of mutual cultural transfer. That was also true for the conditions existing inside the urban society.

Insofar as it concerns the *burgenses*, the Law of Assizes is characteristic: it submits different national groups to the same juridical practice and to the same laws, recognizing at the same time their proper identity. Certainly, there still exists the question concerning the degree up to which the

4. COLLENBERG, «Le déclin», pp. 76-83.

5. Cf. J. RICHARD, «Culture franque et culture grecque: Le Royaume de Chypre au XVème siècle», *BF* 11 (1987), pp. 400-401.

Roman elements inside this law are the result of a mixture with the Byzantine law, or, they also come from the West.

The phenomena of intergration are better asserted where the juridical status of the population is concerned. A characteristic case is that of the Byzantine paroikoi who fell into the category of serfs after the Frankish conquest. They belonged not only to the world of the open country but also to the world of the cities. They were equal to the poor; some of them were even well off. In an effort to improve the State Economy, the French granted them the possibility to buy their freedom and, consequently, rise to a higher status, entering the society of free men; they took advantage of it, in great numbers.

Possibilities of social promotion, partial intergration into the system of power, perpetuation of certain juridical practices (for instance, justice administered by a jury in the villages⁶), or even practices of the Byzantine private Law may also indicate transculturation and, at the same time, they suggest the existence of resistances. In other words, they offer the limits inside which a social and cultural dualism is made possible, without necessarily implying the complete loss of the values of the subject society. Nevertheless, we must look elsewhere for the interiorization of these contacts.

Despite the institutional bonds existing between the French society in Cyprus and its cradle (mainly in the religious level), this society was characterized by an intense feeling of locality. This feeling was due, as we have said, to cultural mixtures. Anyhow, these mixtures did not completely result in the creation of a collective cultural identity: the

6. PAN. J. ZEPOS, *Droit et institutions franques du Royaume de Chypre* [= XV^e Congrès International d'Études Byzantines, Rapports et Co-rapports], Athens 1976, pp. 4-5; J. RICHARD, *Le droit et les institutions franques dans le Royaume de Chypre* [= XV^e Congrès International d'Études Byzantines, Rapports et Co-rapports], Athens 1979, pp. 6-7.

domination system, the sharing of economic roles with the intense commercial interventions, the religious differences as well as the national clashes, the various languages, all that did not favour the creation of a common identity, but only phenomena of interpenetration. Moreover, these phenomena were not expressed with the same intensity and scope inside all the social strata, even less inside the inferior ones. The system of power itself imposed their preeminence there where the social mobility was really confirmed, that is inside the upper levels of the society.

Insofar as the testimonies come from individuals belonging to these classes, the image they give is rather biased.

The Church remained certainly the most solid though necessarily flexible field – not so as a theological system, but rather as a system of worship: here, the mixtures were expressed in relation to transfers from one dogma to another through the worship practices (mass celebrations, burials), as well as in relation to the architecture – Gothic order – and the painting.

The Church of the subject to the French population was not homogeneous, because Cyprus was a place where many religions and national groups coexisted; the western society was also of various origin. Anyhow, when it comes to numbers, the orthodox Church of the natives was the more important one. The Orthodox were aware that they belonged to a world not exclusively defined by the feeling of locality, a feeling also shared by the French and the Oriental. They were conscious that they were both Romans and orthodox, and that these qualities, though overlapping each other, were not identical.

This awareness of the natives about the individuality of their religion led to oppositions and challenges: and the miracles, which are the best way a religion has to prove its

truth and strength, as well as a procedure accepted by both societies, made these challenges more apparent.

In the narrative of Makhairas about the foundation of the monastery of the Holy Cross (a narrative which refers closely to miracles), we see the French civil authorities accepting the miraculous quality of the Oriental saints, their relics and their icons, especially those of the Holy Cross⁷. This acceptance, regardless of the mythical element in which it is presented, suggests a space where ritual transculturation takes place. It is evident that this contributes to the formation of a common psychological space, as well as to the formation of common attitudes.

Anyway, the approach of the two Churches was achieved through clashes, through the resistance of the Orthodox Church for which the latin conquest was almost a catastrophe, a catastrophe hindering even the solutions *κατ' οἰκονομίαν*, that osmosis which appears in the level of rituals. For instance, the Patriarchate was opposed to common church services; it even urged praying individually at home, rather than attending Mass.

In the «morality narratives» (for instance, the narration of the thirteen martyrs of Kantara, at 1221⁸) as well as in the texts of Neophytos and especially in those of the patriarch Germanos II (1222-1240)⁹, we can see very clearly the confrontation of the two Churches and the formation of the

7. LEONTIOS MAKHAIRAS, *Recital concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus entitled «Chronicle»*, ed. R. M. Dawkins, I, Oxford 1932, pp. 6-8, 34-40, 62-70.

8. *Διήγησις τῶν ἁγίων τριῶν καὶ δέκα ὁσίων πατέρων τῶν διὰ πῦρος τελειωθέντων παρὰ τῶν Λατίνων ἐν τῇ νήσῳ Κύπρῳ*, ed. K. N. Sathas, in *Μεσαιωνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, 2, Venice 1873 (exact repr. Athens 1972), pp. 20-39.

9. *Νεοφύτου πρότερον μοναχοῦ καὶ Ἐγκλείστου, περὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν χώραν Κύπρον σκαιῶν*, ed. Sathas, *ibid.*, pp. 1-4; Letters of Germanos II, *ibid.*, pp. 5-19, 39-46. See also the autobiography of Gregory II, the Cypriote, patriarch of Constantinople (1283-1289): *Γρηγορίου τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου... πατριάρχου περὶ τοῦ καθ' ἑαυτὸν βίου ὡς ἀπ' ἄλλου προσώπου*, ed. W. Lamere: *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre*, Brussels-Rome 1937, pp. 177-179.

resistance: the limitation of the strength of the Orthodox Church is interiorized to an anti-western attitude, in which the civil authority is viewed through the schema of the Holy Passion (in the Martyrdom, the king behaves like Pontius Pilatus, though without washing his hands).

There are two factors leading to ritual osmosis: one, the conquest itself which implies the supremacy of the Catholic Church; two, the profound feeling of locality of the island authorities, with all the cultural connotations involved. To better understand this mentality, especially the predisposition for a cultural osmosis, we have to study the chronographers and examine the way in which they comprehend the history of Cyprus and the way in which this conception is expressed. They are both witnesses as well as eminent products of the phenomenon of transculturation.

Makhairas is the most eloquent one.

The good geographical position of Cyprus, its fertility, all that is a common topos. This positive image is however mitigated by the experience of famine and of plague, as well as of the astral conditioning. For the people of the combattant Church, the Frankish conquest is an everlasting tempest; Makhairas accepts it without discussion.

The conquest is a system of power: but, for Makhairas, this system is always imported. The defense of the island has been left to the army which had been established on the island, and the inhabitants are responsible for its maintenance: thus, the local defense does not depend on the capability of the population itself, in other words, in the collective consciousness; the power is not a result of the inner coherence of the local society.

The most important of the collective values, as we have said, is religion and its institutions (bishops, bishoprics); its symbols of worship (saints and relics, Holy Cross), and most

of all, the miracles. Nevertheless, there is an awareness about the individual peculiarities of the two societies, the oriental and the western, the former being composed of the natives, Greeks and others, belonging for the most part to the larger field of the Patriarchate of Antiocheia. This united religious space must have had a chance to interact: the élites must know also the syriac, and this, according to Makhairas, happened before the Frankish conquest¹⁰.

We are, consequently, dealing with a preeminently Greek-speaking world who cultivates the scholarly and, at the same time, universal Greek language, and the syriac. We are also in presence of limit-situations, that is in an excelling field of mixture and diffusions. The scholarly language is lost for the élites who participate in the system of power imposed by the Frankish conquest; but it remains an appanage of the ecclesiastical writing, indicating thus a field of continuities, indeed of resistances. There is also the consciousness that the Greek-speaking people belong to the Roman world, the orthodox Cypriots are Romans, though all the inhabitants of Cyprus, regardless of religious or national differences, are also Cypriots. This shows the breadth of the stage in which the transculturation was taking place. Its best witness is language itself, which nevertheless, according to Makhairas, is understood as cultural regression: for him, the linguistic osmosis, the French idioms which serve the new needs of contact, constitute a process of barbarism in the Greek language, consequently, a cultural devaluation¹¹.

A mirror of the cultural contacts, the Cypriot language of the Chronicles is also a token of a cultural gap, of which Makhairas was completely conscious, as we have seen: the feeling of locality, the expression of which is the current lin-

10. MAKHAIRAS, ed. Dawkins, § 158, p. 142, l. 4-9.

11. MAKHAIRAS, § 158, p. 142, l. 10.

guistic idiom, is for him a sort of cultural isolation (*εἰς τὸν κόσμον δὲν ἤξεύρουσιν ἴντα συντυχάννομεν* = in the world, they don't know what language we are speaking¹²).

Nevertheless, the adoption of the local dialect for the structuring of the historical memory shows also the moment in which the local élites feel that they have been intergrated in the power system with equal, at least spiritual, rights. Certainly, there is the precedent of the Greek translation of the Assizes, which also obeys to the linguistic reality which has been created after the Frankish conquest and which corresponds to a society where the language of the chancellery is not comprehensible to all.

However, the field of history remains the appanage of the language spoken by the dominant society, and this means that the cultural appurtenance is a western one. The Chronicles break this discordance and translate a social reality, that is the intergration of the Greek-speaking element into the administrative and military space, as well as into the space of economy. This is the element which accept the Chronicles and not the majority of the population which, especially in its greater part of the rural world, is presented in a negative way: *τοὺς καταραμένους χωργιάτες* (= these damned peasants)¹³.

The demotic language of the Chronicles is not opposed to an official, scholarly one; on the contrary, it is a common language, spoken also by the upper stratum of the society to which anyhow it is addressed. The memory of the other language, the scholarly Greek, is that which causes Makhairas to underestimate the current spoken language; but the use of this scholarly Greek in the sphere of civil administration is not possible any more.

The language of these Chronicles is Greek in its structure

12. ΜΑΚΧΑΪΡΑΣ, § 158, p. 142, l. 12-13.

13. ΜΑΚΧΑΪΡΑΣ, *ibid.*, p. 674, l. 15-16.

as well as in its vocabulary: the non-Greek words are incorporated in the Greek system of declension, except for the proper names which remain invariable. The new words, where signs of transculturation appear, refer to a large field of practices, institutions, techniques, to new things brought by the conquest. It is characteristic the predominance of the French and Italian words in whatever concerns war, navigation, civil institutions, architecture.

Nevertheless, one must point out the parallel use of Greek or hellenized latin words, for instance, *τειχίον*, *τειχόκαστρον*, next to *κάστρον*, *καστέλλιν*¹⁴; but especially one must point out the substitution of certain Greek terms to the French ones, with most striking example the *fie* (the feudal domain), which becomes *φουμίν*, *φωμία* (breads), and the feudatories, *φουμᾶτοι*; this is also valid for the terms *ἄρχος*, *ἀρχοντολόγιν*, instead of *seignor*, *seignour*¹⁵.

On the other hand, Greek terms pass into the Frankish terminology, as for instance, *climata*, *drahti*, *frahte*, *hrosomillies*, *neragies*, *zizifies*, *pefco*, *tradafillicies*, *bournelies*, *rodaquinies*, *protoquiporo*, *quythriatico* (the tax on the mills), *apodixes* or *apodices*, *yconomo*, and others which are found in the Remembrances¹⁶. Finally, we have a parallel use of terms concerning agricultural possessions, for instance, *κράτημα*, *κράτησις*, next to *tenouria*, *tenure*¹⁷.

14. ΜΑΚΗΑΙΡΑΣ, *ibid.*, p. 70, l. 7; p. 452, l. 36, 37; p. 454, l. 5, p. 456, l. 12, and *passim*; GEORGE BOUSTRONIOS, *Δήγησις χρόνιως Κύπρου*, ed. K. N. Sathas, in *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, 2, Venice 1873. Athens 1972, p. 492, 523, and *passim*.

15. ΜΑΚΗΑΙΡΑΣ, ed. Dawkins, p. 96, l. 4; p. 112, l. 30; p. 140, l. 18; p. 172, l. 27; p. 340, l. 4. LAMBROS, «Κυπριακά», p. 345, no. 67, 1; p. 347, no. 68, 1; cf. J. RICHARD and TH. PAPADOPOULLOS, *Le Livre des Remembrances de la Secrète du Royaume de Chypre (1468-1469)*, Nicosia 1983, pp. 18-19, no. 34; pp. 29-30, no. 57; p. 74, no. 150; p. 101, no. 181, and *passim*.

16. RICHARD-PAPADOPOULLOS, *Remembrances*, p. 120, no. 207; p. 9, no. 11; p. 12, no. 19; p. 41, no. 85; p. 68, no. 144; p. 112, no. 195, and *passim*.

17. ΜΑΚΗΑΙΡΑΣ, *ibid.*, p. 14, l. 25; ΜΑΚΗΑΙΡΑΣ, ed. Sathas, glossary, s.v. *κράτημα*, *κράτησις*; RICHARD-PAPADOPOULLOS, *Remembrances*, glossary, s.v. *tenouria*.

These few examples suffice to suggest the two-ways cultural phenomena in the level of language, that is in the level of the interiorization of cultural contacts.

