

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 1 (2004)

Vol 1, No (2004)



Milestones in the Historiography of the Cyprus Question

Paschalis M. Kitromilides

doi: [10.12681/hr.180](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.180)

To cite this article:

Kitromilides, P. M. (2005). Milestones in the Historiography of the Cyprus Question. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 1, 287–292. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.180>

MILESTONES IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE CYPRUS QUESTION

The recent public debate in Greece and Cyprus provoked by the UN plan proposed in November 2002 for the settlement of the Cyprus Question has rekindled interest in a problem of long standing, a problem that has been occasionally described as the “last phase of the Eastern Question”. In thinking about the Cyprus Question it would be well to remember that the long history of the problem, since at least the British occupation of the island of Cyprus in 1878, has provided the background to a remarkable scholarly literature, which has appraised in considerable depth the successive phases and the multiple aspects, domestic as well as international, of a convoluted conflict. It should be remembered, therefore, that the Cyprus Question besides a political and international problem is also an important scholarly problem, which should be approached according to the norms of scholarship in order to be fully understood and fairly debated.

In what follows an attempt is being made to recall some of the major scholarly contributions to the historiography of the Cyprus Question in order to illustrate the breadth of the pertinent bibliography. The methodological approach to be followed in this presentation is based on a periodisation, dictated by the major phases in the evolution of the Cyprus Question since the 1930s. The phases that form the basis of the periodisation of the scholarly literature were shaped by the interplay of domestic factors with international politics, which created a dynamic that invariably complicated the problem.

By way of introduction I should note two fundamental works, which really constitute the milestones that map out the territory of serious scholarship on the Cyprus Question: the fourth volume of the *History of Cyprus* by Sir George Hill (*The Ottoman Province, the British Colony*, ed. Harry Luke, Cambridge 1952) and the two-volume work by François Crouzet, *Le conflit de Chypre 1946-1959* (Brussels 1973). Although now dated Hill's work is indispensable for the wealth of historical detail it makes available and for its criticism of the sources, both features contributing to a serious understanding of politics in

colonial Cyprus. François Crouzet, an eminent French historian, worked on Cyprus in a project of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and attempted to show the structural factors that contributed to what turned out to be an ethnic conflict made intractable by the involvement of international forces that telescoped local conflicts into much vaster confrontations. These two works constitute the obligatory starting bibliographical point of all serious work on the Cyprus Question and the ability to do this is a yardstick for measuring the reliability of all subsequent work.

The Cyprus Question in the 1930s

The uprising of 21 October 1931 in Nicosia and other cities but also in parts of the Cypriot countryside could be considered the modern origin of the Cyprus Question. The rising, the reaction of the colonial power to it and its consequences for local politics set in motion a series of crises that account for the subsequent complications and contradictions that still plague the Cyprus problem. The 1931 events in Cyprus attracted the attention of a historian of the preeminence of Arnold Toynbee, who in two reports in successive volumes of the *Survey of International Affairs* (for 1931 and 1932) he compiled at the time recorded very perceptive and acute observations on the socio-political dynamics of the problem. In particular Toynbee pointed to the growth of Greek nationalism among the rural population of Cyprus as a factor that added significant dynamism to the *enosis* movement in the island, a dynamism ignored by the imperious attitude of the colonial power with disastrous consequences later on. This early phase of the Cyprus Question has formed the object of a truly magisterial historiographical contribution by G. S. Georghalides, who could be considered, without risk of exaggeration, the most authoritative historian of the period of British rule in Cyprus: G. S. Georghalides, *Cyprus under the governorship of Sir Roland Storrs*, Nicosia 1985 [Cyprus Research Centre, Texts and Studies of the History of Cyprus XIII]. This major work completes the survey of the early period of British rule in Cyprus by the same historian: *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus, 1918-1926, with a Survey of the Foundations of British Rule*, Nicosia 1979 [Texts and Studies, VI]. The handling of the rising in 1931 by Greek diplomacy and in particular by Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, who had the courage to stand up to the pressures of nationalist emotionalism, is the object of the most significant contribution to the subject in Greek by Yiannis Pikros, *Ο Βενιζέλος και το Κυπριακό* [Venizelos and the Cyprus Question], Athens 1980.

The Cyprus Question under the impact of World War II: the 1940s

The Second World War brought about fundamental changes to the definition of the problem, on two levels. First on the international level following Britain's fight for freedom against the Axis and the Cypriots' response and support for the British effort it was difficult to ignore their own wishes for self-determination. On the domestic level the emergence of the organised Left as a decisive factor in local politics, as made plain by the landslides of the Left in municipal elections in 1943, 1946 and 1949, added an important new player to Cypriot politics. The new political landscape that emerged in Cyprus in the 1940s is considered in detail on the basis of extensive documentation by Rolandos Katsiaounis, *Η Διασκεπτική 1946-1948* [The Consultative Assembly 1946-1948], Nicosia 2000 [Texts and Studies XXVIII].

The decade of internationalization and the liberation struggle: the 1950s

Greece's appeals to the United Nations for the recognition of the right of self-determination to the people of Cyprus (1954, 1955, 1956 and 1957) and the armed liberation struggle initiated in Cyprus (1955-1959) turned the Cyprus Question from a bilateral Greco-British problem into an international issue, with Turkey and the United States and other players drawn in. The international climate of the Cold War inevitably drew the Soviet Union, but also the non-aligned countries into the picture as it emerges from the debates on Cyprus in the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Cyprus Question was led to a –temporary as it turned out– settlement with the Zürich and London Agreements of February 1959. These developments generated a considerable literature from among which stand out two imposing works by Stephen G. Xydis, *Cyprus. Conflict and Conciliation 1954-1958*, Columbus Ohio 1967 and *Cyprus: Reluctant Republic*, The Hague and Paris 1973.

The international aspect of the Cyprus Question in the 1950s forms also the object of two other more recent studies: Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus 1954-1959*, Oxford 1998 and Ioannis D. Stephanides, *Isle of Discord. Nationalism, Imperialism and the Making of the Cyprus Problem*, London 1999. Both of these studies are distinguished by the quality of writing, the extensive research and the critical perspectives that inform them on British and

Greek diplomacy respectively. Robert Holland contributes substantively not only to the appraisal of British policy on Cyprus which he judges short-sighted and vindictive, but more importantly he provides a reappraisal of the armed liberation struggle in Cyprus pointing to its comparative significance and placing it in a broader context of political interrelations and options in the age of decolonization. He thus offers a more substantive understanding of the dynamics of the problem that leads beyond the image of a terrorist campaign as the struggle was depicted by British diplomacy and reflected for instance in the detailed study by Nancy Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, London 1978. I. D. Stephanides' monograph on the other hand represents a remarkable exception in the plethora of writings by Greek and Cypriot authors who avoid to pass judgement on Greek and especially on Cypriot policies and decisions in the successive crises and tend to put the blame squarely on the "imperialist factor", depicting the Greeks as mere victims of the machinations of foreign powers.

The 1960s: statehood and ethnic conflict

The 1960s represent a critical phase in the evolution of the Cyprus Question, marked by the island's advent to independent statehood. Independence presented the Cypriots with a test of their ability to responsibly govern themselves. To Greece Cypriot statehood presented a test of her will and ability to tolerate an independent Cyprus as an equal partner in international relations. The psychology underlying this test is sketched out with great virtuosity by Alexander Xydis, «Το ψυχολογικό πλέγμα» [The psychological complex] in the collective volume A. Xydis et al., *Ο Μακάριος και οι σύμμαχοί του* [Makarios and his Allies], Athens 1972. Xydis' perceptive essay in political psychology has retained over a thirty-year period its topicality as a source of explanation of the periodic tensions and crises in the relations between Greece and Cyprus.

The most important study on the early history of the Republic of Cyprus is Diana Weston-Markides, *Cyprus 1957-1963. From Colonial Conflict to Constitutional Crisis. The Key Role of the Municipal Issue*, Minneapolis 2001. This is a dispassioned analysis of the issue of separate municipalities introduced in the principal cities of Cyprus by the London agreements – an issue that turned out to be the major cause of the breakdown of the 1960 constitutional settlement in 1963. The author elucidates the inception and early discussion of the idea of separate municipalities and the subsequent problems in attempting to apply it in the new republic.

The 1970s: tragedy and survival

The 1970s was for Cyprus a period of tragedy brought about by the coup of 15 July, 1974, engineered by the Greek military regime, and the Turkish invasion that followed. The dramatic events generated an extensive literature, predictably of unequal quality. From the plethora of pertinent contributions one might single out two collective volumes, based on conferences that met in Nicosia in June and September 1976 respectively. These two collections are of significance as early attempts at a self-critical examination of the problem by the Cypriots themselves: M. Attalides, ed., *Cyprus Reviewed*, Nicosia 1977 and Peter Worseley and P. M. Kitromilides eds., *Small States in the Modern World: The Conditions of Survival*, Nicosia 1979. Mention should also be made of an important contribution by the distinguished American journalist Laurence Stern, *The Wrong Horse. The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy*, New York 1977, which offers a chronicle of covert American action aiming at destabilizing the Republic of Cyprus and points to the irrationalism and short-sightedness of US attitudes toward President Makarios.

Besides scholarly literature the successive crises of the Cyprus Question have generated important accounts by some of the principal participants. Inevitably some of these works are better than others, but a few among them are of fundamental significance for an understanding of the problem: E. Averoff-Tosizza, *Lost Opportunities: the Cyprus Question 1952-1963*, New York: New Rochelle, N.Y. 1986 and Glafkos Cleridis, *Cyprus: My Deposition*, 4 vols., Nicosia 1989-1992. Of sources available only in Greek the serious student of the Cyprus Question cannot overlook the writings of three important critical observers and participants: C. Christidis, *Κυπριακό και Ελληνοτουρκικά. Πορεία μιας εθνικής χρεωκοπίας* [The Cyprus Question and Greek-Turkish Relations. Trajectory of a National Bankruptcy], Athens 1967 and *Κυπριακό 1968-1980* [The Cyprus Question 1968-1980], Athens 1984; Ploutis Servas, *Κυπριακό. Ευθύνες* [The Cyprus Question. Responsibilities], 4 vols., Athens 1980-1993. Christidis, a distinguished lawyer and intellectual, was a legendary pamphleteer from the 1950s to the 1970s, producing under the pseudonym Damonides acute appraisals of the Cyprus Question, full of perceptive judgements and prescient warnings on the policy options adopted by successive Greek governments and Cypriot leaders. Servas was a veteran Cypriot communist leader, who was expelled from the party in the late 1940s and in this work he apportions blame and responsibility to all those who had played an active role in handling the Cyprus problem over the critical decades from the

1940s to the 1970s. Finally of special value is the testimony of M. Dekleris, *Κυπριακό. Η τελευταία ευκαιρία 1972-1974* [The Cyprus Question. The Last Chance 1972-1974], Athens 1981, ²2003. The author, a senior Greek judge, participated as a constitutional expert in the inter-communal talks in Cyprus on the eve of the invasion and in his book he outlines the narrowing of differences between the two communities which would have made an agreement possible had it not been for the coup and the invasion.

* * *

This has been a rather condensed survey of an extensive literature, pointing out what, in the present author's judgement, is required reading by the scholar, journalist or observer who wants to develop a serious understanding of a complex, often contradictory and tragic problem. Part of the problem has been due to cognitive inadequacies and for this reason there is no other remedy than a serious self-education by all those who aspire to judge and to act in the Cyprus Question. What has been offered above is no more than a chart for apprentice navigators in a sea with many reefs and shallows.

University of Athens
and
Institute for Neohellenic Research / NHRF

Paschalis M. Kitromilides