Victorian Cyprus: Society and Institutions in the Aftermath of the Anglo-Turkish Convention, 1878-91

Kyriakos N. Demetriou, University of Cyprus

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/kyriakos_demetriou/28/
In April 1889 a deputation of Cypriots, headed by the Archbishop Sophronios and consisting of eminent citizens of the island, was received in London by the Colonial Office. Their purpose had been to recount the general state of affairs in the island after almost twelve years of British rule. The picture was gloomy: despite the hopes which the Cypriots naturally indulged in and which many Englishmen cherished of improving the material prosperity and moral constitution of the people, the island was going ‘to certain ruin’. In the words of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Knutsford, ‘[t]he principal demands of the Memorial and of the Deputation are based upon a deterioration in the economical condition of Cyprus which is supposed to have taken place since the British occupation. In the opinion of the Deputation that condition is appreciably worse than under the Turkish administration, and is likely to end in the final ruin of the community’.¹ The deputation informed the Secretary that the ‘loyal and peaceful inhabitants of the Island gratefully hope to be able to follow the steps of progress and civilisation of the other inhabitants of the vast British Empire’.² The population of the island, financially drained and in a state of great misery, trusted that Britain would have promoted decisively political reforms consistent with European civilisation and liberty, and that prompt efforts would be accordingly made to develop the resources of the island. Given the prospects then opened their hopes did not appear irrational. Britain aspired to put into action essential reforms in Asiatic

¹. Quoted in R.H. Lang, 'Cyprus after twelve years of British Rule', *Macmillan's Magazine* 63 (1890) 17.
². *Memorial* (Nicosia 1889) 3.
KYRIACOS DEMETRIOU

Turkey, and Cyprus could have been held up as a practical example of the kind of justice and administration which all the Turkish provinces required.

The purpose of this essay is to present little known phases of Cypriot society and institutions in the aftermath of the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1878. Its scope is therefore strictly confined to the years 1878-1891, i.e. the first years of the British administration. It does not purport to constitute a political essay, in terms of throwing light upon the circumstances and motives that gave rise to the formation of an Anglo-Turkish alliance. Suffice it to remind the reader that under the ‘Convention of Defensive Alliance’ between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Abdul Hamid II undertook to assign the island to be occupied and administered by England under his suzerainty as a place d’armes in the Near East. The Sultan promised thereupon to introduce necessary reforms in Anatolia for the protection of the Christian and other subjects of the Porte in these territories. Disraeli and his Foreign Secretary Salisbury judged that the island provided the best strategic post in the eastern Mediterranean from which Britain could easily defend Turkey and the route to India from Russian aggression. It could further provide the most secure base for the trade of the Empire once the Suez Canal was completed. Their belief was nevertheless hotly disputed by contemporary political circles and military officials. The interested reader may resort, however, to existing historical sources to get relevant information on the strategical


complications and the wider political context. The essay brings to light neglected and widely unknown sources on Cyprus from the late Victorian period and fills a literary and bibliographical lacuna in this respect. The account on Cyprus is here informed by the keen and critical eye of the Victorian politician, scholar, traveller, or ambitious businessman, and no consistent use is made of public records and documents. Of their works, some were compiled chiefly from already existing sources but some were noticeably fascinating and essential guides for those interested in finding out more about contemporary Cyprus. It cannot be overlooked that nineteenth-century Britain was a journalising society. The various periodical publications had been the chief means of communicating knowledge by which a society understood its own development. As John North rightly points out, several reasons account for the existence of a massive periodical press in Victorian times: ‘an overwhelming rise in literacy . . .; the fascination of the public with newspaper and magazine reporting of rapid developments in technology and science and the growth in empire and the flowering of the arts.’

The press functioned as a social binding force through which the triumphs of the British empire were made widely known.

I

In June 1878 the British public was informed of the new acquisition and Cyprus naturally became a subject of intense interest. The nation, as Samuel Laing put it, ‘awoke next morning to find itself mistress of Cyprus and committed to the most enormous responsibilities of defending Turkey and regenerating Asia Minor’. People began to wonder about Britain’s new territorial responsibility and those who had


7. S. Laing, ‘The Convention with Turkey’, Fortnightly Review 24 (1878) 159. See also W.G. Palgrave, ‘The Revival of Turkey’, Quarterly Review 146 (1878) 594: It was ‘a responsibility worthy of a great nation, the responsibility of conferring the blessing of order, justice, stability, and prosperity . . . on Asia’.
been in the island described their experiences in books and articles that found a responsive readership. The most learned Victorians could resort to various sources to get sufficient information about the island. The French had already made vast excursions to the country and Albert Gaudry’s *Recherches*, published in 1855, offered to the public the results of his scientific research into the physical and social geography of the island. Gaudry was sent to Cyprus in 1853 by the Minister of Agriculture, and his book goes minutely into the rural life and society of the Cypriots. Mas-Latrie, who wrote the *Histoire de l’île de Chypre*, dealt primarily with the commercial relations of mediaeval Cyprus with Genoa, Venice and Egypt, but did not omit to comment on nineteenth-century political questions, alluding occasionally to the tradition of old Frankish rule in the island and the possibilities of its renewal. W.H. Engel’s *Kypros*, and Ludwig Ross’s *Reisen . . . und der Insel Cypern*, published a few decades earlier were undoubtedly two of the most instructive sources, though accessible to a specific group of readers. Older sources, such as Pococke’s *Description of the East*, or Abbé Mariti’s *Travels*, were simply to satisfy the interested historian and political sociologist.


11. W.H. Engel, Kypros. Eine Monographie, 2 vols (Berlin 1841), mostly a compilation concerning the geography and history of the island; L. Ross, Reisen nach Kas, Halikarnassos, Rhodos und der Insel Cypern (Halle 1852). We should add to the list, T. Kotchy, Reisen nach Cypern und Klein-Asien, 1859 (Gotha 1862), quoted very often by British authors; F. Unger, Die Insel Cypern (Vienna 1866), a book dealing with archaeology; as well as J. Seiff, Reisen in der Asiatischen Turkei (Leipzig 1875), that provides some useful information about the island.

12. R. Pococke, A Description of the East and some other Countries, 2 vols (London 1743-45); G. Mariti, Travels in the Island of Cyprus, Syria, and Palestine in 1760-68, 2 vols, trans. from the Italian Viaggi per l’ isola di Cipro, etc., Lucca 1769 (London 1791); Mariti offers a good description of the inhabitants and their manners in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. C.S. Sonnini also, Voyage en Grèce et en Turquie (Paris 1801), gives a fair description of Cyprus. Other useful sources had been: A. Olivier, Voyage dans...
Robert Hamilton Lang, the British consul in Larnaca in the early 1870s, vividly relates the reaction of the Victorians on hearing the news: ‘To all ranks the interest spread. Merchants thought they would find in this new field the profits they so ardently desired. Clergymen hoped to find in Cyprus suitable positions for the young men who engaged their sympathies . . . Sportsmen fancied there had opened before them a grand chance for new excitement.’¹³ The island stimulated the imagination of the most adventurous: a new unexplored land with its secrets and hidden knowledge.¹⁴ At a practical level it could provide chances for capitalist exploitation as well as employment to some of the indigent British workers. The British public was, however, soon to be disenchanted with their new possession: Archibald Forbes, a learned war correspondent called Cyprus, in a thoroughly provocative article, a ‘miserable island in a dead angle of the Mediterranean’.¹⁵ All things considered, it seems that the popular negative impression of the island was shaped by an unfortunate event. Soon after the implementation of the Convention with Turkey the War Office sent to Cyprus a contingent of over 9,000 men, who had been earlier in Malta, without obtaining any previous information about existing facilities. Under the burning sun of the summer the troops tried in vain to find proper accommodation, and soon a fever epidemic broke out among them (most likely symptoms of


¹⁴. J. Murray anticipated that many British would travel to the island and in his *Handbook of Turkey in Asia* (London 1878) included a relevant guide to travellers. W.H. Mallock and his unnamed friend travelled to the island with the intention to discover fragments of mysterious treasures of antiquity. See *In an Enchanted Island or A Winter’s Retreat in Cyprus* (London 1889) 14-5.

malarial infection) — 25 per cent of the total force reported sick, and eventually many of them perished.\textsuperscript{16} The climate was now declared ‘treacherous’, the place was labelled ‘a pestiferous hole’.\textsuperscript{17} The author in the \textit{London Quarterly Review} wished that the latest good news about Cyprus, coming from Sir Garnet Wolseley,\textsuperscript{18} the first appointed High Commissioner, ‘be truer than the doleful anticipations which the presence of a . . . sickness among the troops had raised in the minds of our newspaper scribes’.\textsuperscript{19} It seems that Cyprus proved not to be a new paradise. In effect, as Phil Robinson observed, ‘instead of a fertile land covered with groves of fruit and fine woods once rendering it the paradise of the Levant, there is hardly upon earth a more wretched spot than it now exhibits’\textsuperscript{20} And Horatio H. Kitchener, admitted that some were ‘horribly disgusted because it [the island] is not the seventh heaven promised by Mohammed to true believers’\textsuperscript{21}

There are several reasons that may account for the interest shown in Cyprus by Victorians. First, one needs to investigate Victorian society to understand that the high demand for learning and new knowledge was peculiar to the age. Hitherto Cyprus had been a country known exclusively to classical scholars, familiar with Homer and the \textit{Histories} of Herodotus. The island had been wrapped in a veil of mythical narratives, its contemporary development being entirely a matter of indifference. But as a new member of the vast British Empire it clearly commanded greater attention. Politicians effectively managed to present

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} On the miserable conditions of the camps, see, A. Brassey, \textit{Sunshine and Storm in the East} (London 1880) 254–5, 270, 277–8.
\item \textsuperscript{17} See, e.g., W.F. Martin, \textit{Cyprus as a Naval Station and a Place of Arms} (London 1879) 8. See further, T. Brassey, ‘The future of Cyprus’, in \textit{Recent Letters \& Speeches} (London 1879) 15: the Liberal MP argued that Cyprus was not adapted for a place of arms partly because of its unhealthy climate. The Rev. E.J. Davis similarly drew attention to the unhealthiness of the climate, \textit{Life in Asiatic Turkey} (London 1879) 459.
\item \textsuperscript{18} He obviously refers to the ‘Extract from a Letter of Sir Garnet Wolseley’, published in \textit{Macmillan's Magazine} 39 (1878) 96. Cyprus, he writes, is presented as ‘a sort of earthly hell, whereas it is far from being so’.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Anon., ‘Cyprus’, \textit{London Quarterly Review} 51 (1878) 373.
\item \textsuperscript{20} P. Robinson, \textit{Cyprus: its Physical, Economical, Historical, Commercial and Social Aspects} (London 1878) 19. In fact Robinson copied verbatim Clarke, \textit{Travels}, IV 20; things, after all, changed but insignificantly.
\item \textsuperscript{21} H.H. Kitchener, ‘Notes from Cyprus’, \textit{Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine} 126 (1879) 157.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
the whole issue of the possession of the island under the guise of a philanthropic and civilising mission whereas, as far as they were concerned, it was viewed principally in strategic terms. The Turkish administrative misrule, and the Asiatic despotism of the Sultan and his Commissioners, people believed, had led the island to virtual devastation and cultural obscurity. The Ottomans spent little on developmental works, and the physical infrastructure of the country was left in the condition it was at the time of the Venetians. The country, according to Ulick Ralph Burke, mostly known in Victorian literary circles for his historical work on Spain, 'had been shamefully governed, oppressed, secluded, and starved by the Turks. It was to be handsomely administered, enriched, and thrown open to the world by the English'.  

The British rule had virtually to regenerate the island and bring the semi-barbarian population into a state of tolerable living. And the results of good government in this country would exercise a moral and reforming influence in Western Asia. In other words, Cyprus as a British possession should have become a model of good government, 'an oasis in the surrounding desert of unenlightened administrations'.

II

Samuel Brown landed at Larnaca, the chief seaport, on the first day of December 1878 and spent three months in Cyprus, obviously till the end of the rainy season, his avowed intention being to become personally acquainted with the place and people. The extraordinary and opposed statements and discrepancies in references to Cyprus were abundant in the London daily press and any effort to single out the truth out of the scraps of information was destined to fail. What struck Brown first was that the island was devoid of fertility and cultivation, the dominating vision was bare chalk hills: the place looked like a deserted

---

25. Extensive quotations from the English daily press, presenting the many conflicting statements about the island, had been collected by the anonymous author of *Cyprus: its Value and Importance to England* (London 1878) 29-32.
fever-stricken wilderness. The first sight of the place convinced him that the visit to the island would be accomplished only with toil and great discomfort.26 Leaving the port of Larnaca (in effect, a mere open roadstead) for Nicosia, the capital and seat of government, he noted: ‘All was then bare, arid, treeless, waterless; vegetation being represented only by an abundance of sun-dried thistles and prickly shrubs’.27 Malcolm Laing Meason who had visited the island a few years earlier, and found in those days his memoirs quite interesting for the general public, narrates that going from Larnaca to Nicosia was indeed a time-consuming and fatiguing journey. ‘These thirty miles took us a very long day to get over, so bad were the roads, and such difficulties as the horses, or rather ponies, on which we were mounted had in getting over the ground. In fact, to call those bridle-paths roads is a misnomer.’28 The fact that there was not a single building in the shape of a decent hotel throughout the country must have added to the natural difficulties of the trip. Sir Samuel White Baker, who visited the island, in his own words ‘as an independent traveller’, made a prudent calculation of the circumstances. Prior to his departure he ordered the construction of two comfortable horse coaches, which served besides as a place of residence.29 He was soon to realise, however, that the narrow and rocky

26. Cf. Clarke, Travels, IV 55: ‘Over a barren tract of land, altogether desolate, and destitute even of the meanest herbage, our journey was neither amusing nor profitable. It might have suggested reflections to a moral philosopher, thus viewing the horrid consequences of barbarian power; but when a traveller is exposed to the burning beams of an Eastern sun, mounted upon a sorry mule dislocating his very loins, fatigued, and breathing hot pestilential vapours, he will feel little disposition to moralise’.
29. S. White Baker, Cyprus as I saw it in 1879 (London 1879) 4-5, 15ff. His account rather presents the humorous side of the situation: his gipsy-vans encountered great difficulties to pass through the narrow streets due to their extreme height which interfered with the wooden water-spouts from the low roofs of the houses. In consequence, they suffered considerable damages. ‘My van represented civilisation: the water-spouts represented barbarism’ (16). A few hours after their disembarkment the coaches ‘looked ten years older’. They had been repaired, however. ‘The van looked as good as new, and was much stronger, and well adapted for rough travel. The only thing it now wanted was a road!’ (17).
streets and the natural footpaths rendered the use of wooden wheeled vans impracticable. Lieutenant Kitchener, who was appointed Director of Survey and Head of the Land Registry Office of Cyprus from 1880 to 1883, observed in a passage, that reveals the Cypriot popular mentality, that the ‘natives have no desire to save time, they follow the same narrow rugged tracks up and down the rocks that their fathers followed before them, and if Government undertook to make roads for them, they would soon be again destroyed’. Things were hopefully to change if a few colonists arrived, and the example of their activity ‘would speedily infuse energy into the sleepy inhabitants’.30

On the road between Larnaca and Nicosia, the traveller had to pass through a small number of villages, revealing a picture of insignificant and primitive habitations. The public buildings, where they existed, were generally built of stone, frequently taken from the ruins of ancient cities, whereas most of the private dwellings were constructed of sun-dried bricks, or of wattle and clay. The earthy colour of these bricks ‘gives the houses a dismal appearance, and the traveller is agreeably surprised to find the interior airy and commodious’. These one-room dwellings had usually attached to them a stable and store-house.31 The houses of the poorer peasant farmers (noticeably, the great majority of the population) consisted of one large room, which served all purposes of living. It was not unusual for donkeys and mules to share this accommodation. Most of the roofs were flat, the spaces between the rafters being covered with reed mats. The floors were paved with slabs of hard gypsum, or covered with stamped clay. It is worth observing that only the richer peasants had larger houses, with at least two rooms and sometimes an upper floor. A village in Cyprus of 1878 was composed of a group of such primitive dwellings. If it was a Greek village, then it possessed a church, usually a large rectangular construction, built of stone and domed roofs coated with cement, and with no pretension to ornament and style. The rural population resided in crowded villages,

31. F.H. Fisher, Cyprus, Our New Colony and what we know about it (London 1878) 43-4. See also the description given by E.G. Ravenstein, corresponding member of the Geographical society of Amsterdam, Cyprus: its Resources and Capabilities (London 1878) 24; and Brown, Three Months in Cyprus, 13-5.
detached farmhouses were difficult to find. Phil Robinson, author and pioneer in the field of natural history, was surprised to notice the total absence of the conveniences and comforts which a European was long accustomed to. This extreme simplicity and inexpensiveness of the necessaries of life he attributed to the nature of the climate (the great heat of summer) that rendered the inhabitants less disposed to exertion and predisposed them to a life of ease. The Victorian traveller was gladly offered shelter by monks in their serene Orthodox monasteries, where he could enjoy their genial society and learn about the legends and history of the place.

In the absence of literary life and higher cultural forms of sociability, the villagers followed the long established stereotypes of external life. They were attached to ancient customs in the most obstinate and unrefined way. As Lang observed, the islanders were ‘deficient in the liveliness and nervous activity of the Hellenes’; they were superstitious beyond degree, though singularly attached to family ties. The domestic system of rule was clearly patriarchal, as in any primitive stage of social progress. The wife and children had to pay unconditional devotion to the will of the pater familias. The female population generally lived retired, employed on their household duties, except during the harvest. The predominance of this old-fashioned domestic rule had been supported by odd religious principles, assumed to derive from the eternal dogmas of Christianity. The villagers had christianised heathen rites, their local churches were devoted to a patron saint whom they worshipped and treated like a god. A. Rostovitz recorded an event

33. For a careful and adroit account on the monasteries and churches of Cyprus see, D.G. Hogarth, *Devia Cypria: Notes of an Archaelogical Journey in Cyprus in 1888* (London 1889).
34. Lang, *Cyprus* (I), 327.
35. On the female population of the island see the interesting account of Mrs. Esme Scott-Stevenson, *Our Home in Cyprus* (London 1880) 4-5, 57, 81-93, 246-7. ‘Habits of life and restricted intercourse cause their notions to be entirely different to those of an English lady’ (5).
36. A curious but real incident is recorded by P. Gardner. A village had two chapels, devoted to the same saint who had been addressed with two distinct surnames. ‘Ancient Cyprus’, *Quarterly Review* 146 (1878) 430. W.H. Mallock observed that ‘though the Hellenic temples have fallen, and the earth covers their column, the Hellenic religion still lives today . . . in the religion of the Christian peasantry’. See, ‘Scenes in Cyprus’, *Scribner’s Magazine* 4 (1888) 276.
that illustrates the superstitious character of the Cypriots as well as the authoritative presence of the father. The inhabitants had very little faith in the principles of Hippocrates: ‘At the village of Avgoru (half-way between Famagusta and Larnaca), having seen the three daughters of the proprietor of the house where we rested ill with fever, Dr. McLean wished to administer some medicine, which their father, a priest, peremptorily refused to allow’. Obviously, we may add, under the sincere conviction that God alone could heal his daughters, and no human hands could make them well. Meason considered the cultural poverty of the Cypriots as a profound impediment to the arrival of English people to the island. ‘There is no music; no whist; no mild flirtations; no talking over the last gossip of the club, or the latest disclosures in the Society papers.’ Social relationships were limited to the necessary forms of co-existence. Such social intercourse as was necessary was regulated by a man called Mukhtar, elected annually by the peasants, with a council of elders to assist him. The headman was responsible for the collection and remittance to the Treasury of the Government taxes due from his village, the administration of the property of intestates, as well as to arrest offenders and keep order. Next to the head of the community (the president, or the Mukhtar so called) in the social scale was the priest and the schoolmaster, provided, of course, that a school existed.

The villages had been embryonic communities in which essential relationships were pervaded by a moral code, unwritten and peculiar to each one of them. William Hepworth Dixon characteristically called a village a ‘rustic republic’, ‘living its own life, obeying its own chief, and standing by its local law’. As purposeful social units they were primarily preoccupied with the struggle to secure the means of survival. The mountainous villages were lonely and extremely isolated habitations (as roads to connect them with other places were wanting), attached to traditional rules and customs that helped to keep the native character over the ages. Easter festivities which normally lasted for a week (a length of time incomprehensible to the disapproving British traveller),

37. A. Rostovitz, Memorandum (London 1878) 3.
38. Meason, A Fortnight in Cyprus, 58.
KYRIACOS DEMETRIOU

provided cultural occasions that functioned as a binding social force. The peasants’ struggle to earn the necessities of life, usually through agriculture and farming, had been invariably interlinked with the problem of water supply for the purposes of irrigation. The absence of an organised water supply intensified the problems created by the recurring droughts and the lack of knowledge requisite for applying improved cultivation techniques, thereby disrupting any conception of common welfare. As the *Cyprus Gazette* reveals, the official newspaper of the British Government, the villagers often committed murders, as private disputes over irrigation could not be solved peacefully. But also vast herds of goats wandered over their fields, property of isolated shepherds, causing great disasters to their crops. The forests, already exhausted by the Venetians and the Ottomans to provide timber for the construction of ship and naval military equipment, were wasted along with the field crops. Franz von Löher, whose standard book on Cyprus was translated in English soon after the Convention, observed that quarrels ‘are of constant occurrence between the inhabitants of different villages and communities, and no better way to avenge themselves occurs to the contending parties, than to burn down and hack each others trees under the concealment of night’.40 John Thomson left us a lively picture of a local dicastery assembled to decide on a crime committed by a herdsman whose goats devoured the produce of the locals after he had fallen asleep. Some suggested that the goats who had eaten up part of the winter supplies, should be confiscated but the more rational and moderate, with first and foremost the priest who presided over this peculiar court, refrained from taking this extreme measure as it could not be sustained in any British court of justice.41

The cultural poverty of the islanders and the low state of artistic or literary refinement was indeed explicable in the light of the absence of even ordinary educational institutions. Except from the school in Nicosia, run under the protection of the Archbishop, and two unimportant colleges at Limassol and Larnaca there were none in any other

part of the island worth mentioning. At the local priests’ houses a few children were taught to read and write, and this with the intention of enabling them to offer service to the Church. Thus basic education (in effect confined to reading and writing) was offered by the bishops and some of their priests who had been educated in Athens. But even the village priests could hardly have been able to do more than read. As Löher reported, the country had no learned priesthood: ‘Books they have none, and for their livelihood have to depend upon the bounty of their flocks’. Apart from their religious obligations they had to work in the fields, mind cattle or repair shoes to earn a bare livelihood, like any average citizen.42

The Moslems, similarly, used to send their children to the mosques where reading, writing and the Koran were taught. The British governors realised soon that a system of elementary education was urgently needed.43

References to the character and manners of the Cypriots, either of Greek or Turkish origin, were indeed disheartening. Their education being at the lowest imaginable level naturally affected their general mental and ethical constitution. B. Harris Cowper, editor of the famous Journal of Sacred Literature, portrayed them as ‘ignorant, superstitious, and in many cases indolent, their social condition is bad . . . [b]oth men and women are, as a rule, sadly degraded and in need of enlightenment, and of that impulse to self-improvement’. Instead of any ambition for self improvement the Cypriots fell under the force ‘of the Epicurean philosopher’s advice to mankind, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow ye die”’. According to Brown the people were ‘naturally addicted to indolence and the keeping of innumerable feast, fast, and holydays’.44 Rostovitz who, it may be interesting to note, was sent to investigate the island on behalf of Thomas Cook reported that ‘the people are very poor and uneducated, and a little grasping, and distrustful of civilised ideas’.45 We can easily multiply the distressing

42. Löher, Cyprus, Hist., 89; also, Ravenstein, Cyprus, 25.
44. B.H. Cowper, Cyprus: its past, present, and future (London 1878) 9; Fisher, Cyprus, 37; Brown, Three Months in Cyprus, 23.
45. See the Special Report by the representatives of Messrs. Thos. Cook & Son (London 1878) 5.
accounts referring to the character of the nineteenth-century Cypriots. Most of them were exaggerated and prejudiced, inasmuch as they were formed under the impact of standards quite foreign to the native population. The Victorian traveller was often unable to grasp the general mentality of the natives and made no effort to understand the peculiarities of the local morals of the time. Their language and habits were foreign, not to say repulsive, to the civilised and eccentric upper-class visitor, who far from being flattered by the homage paid to him by the islanders, was disgusted by their unfeigned humility and uncultured servility. This lack of communication between the Victorians and the native islanders had unhappily been projected to the level of political planning and decision-making. Lang, who lived several years in the island and was very sympathetic to the common peasants, relates graphically an incident that illuminates this dramatic want of communication. In an effort to preserve the existing forests of the country and increase rainfall, the British government prohibited the cutting down of timber. The son of a poor priest cut off a branch of a tree in his own garden for cooking purposes — fuel and more sophisticated ways were unheard of. He was summoned before the court. His father, the old priest, went in his place, and was condemned to five days’ imprisonment. The medical officer of the prison ordered his servants to cut off the hair of the priest, as was the practice with all prisoners. It is very well known that the orthodox priests have long hair, which they cut only slightly after a long passage of time. ‘His head of hair is ruthlessly cropt . . . They thus, in ignorance and thoughtlessness, perpetrated an act unjust to the individual and offensive to the religious notions of a respected body of the Queen’s subjects.’

The Turkish community led alike a rustic and retired life, in great impoverishment, that proved a serious impediment to the development of superior characteristics. Despite their poverty the Turkish Cypriots were presented by Victorians as honest and hospitable, but again inflexibly devoted to a dormant oriental tradition. In their capacity as cultivators and producers they were proclaimed to be rude and unenervating

46. Lang, ‘Cyprus — is it worth keeping?’, 444. The event gave rise to a furious debate over the ‘unjust’ treatment of the clergy by the British law courts, in Νέον Κίτιον, especially no. 1, 23/4 June 1879, 3; no. 5-6, 20/22 July 1879, 1-3.
agriculturists, and in general inclined to be miserly and unambitious like the Greek population of the island. As Burke observed ‘nine tenths of the people live on brown bread and black olives . . . and such a diet does not stir men to ambition’. It should be noted that statements specifically about the Turkish Cypriots were rare, not out of indifference, but because it was understood that the various reports on the Greeks usually applied to them as well, as both races had developed common attitudes along with standards of tolerable coexistence. ‘What are the Cypriots?’, wondered Hepworth Dixon: ‘Except in name, they are neither Turks nor Greeks . . . Nowhere have I seen a Turkish figure, nowhere a Grecian profile’. Christian Cypriots and Moslem Cypriots was the distinction favoured by David Hogarth, fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, who visited the island in 1888. Two issues raised, however, exclusively about the Turkish community are worthy of special reference, as they are suggestive of the Cypriot social background at the time, and must have impressed Victorian readers. As Wolseley wrote in his personal diary, kept for his wife and recently published, the Turks of Cyprus like their Greek compatriots suffered from excessive taxation and misrule; they often objected to the privileges that the Greek clergy liberally enjoyed by the government, whereas the common peasantry was reduced to the extremity of indigence. Misery and wretched living conditions led them, as Poole reported, to the abominable action of ‘deliberate destruction of unborn offspring’. It seems that abortion was extensively practised among the Turkish population, as the common peasant was too poor to allow himself the ‘expensive luxury of having children’. Slave labour and trade was often associated with the Turkish element, and especially with

47. J.L. Farley, *Egypt, Cyprus and Asiatic Turkey* (London 1878) 156: ‘Labourers use a kind of plough, a rude and miserable implement, without wheels, drawn by two oxen, and driven by one man.’ See also, Kitchener, ‘Notes from Cyprus’, 151-2.
52. R.S. Poole, ‘Cyprus: its present and future’, *Contemporary Review* 33 (1878) 149.
the officials and the upper class. Lang insisted on the existence of slaves in Cyprus, domestic servants, male and female, who were originally acquired by purchase. The morals of the Turkish segment were loose, according to Lang, as ‘polygamy and concubinage prevail’. Besides this, ‘the Mohammedan population of a few villages had a bad reputation for highway robbery, often accompanied by murder’. Yet gangs of this sort should have undoubtedly included Greek peasants as well.

III

In a country that, as Frederic Gammon remarked in his own treatise on Cyprus was ‘at its lowest ebb, this state of things having been brought about by centuries of Turkish misrule’, the logic of political planning was barely comprehensible. Politics seem to have possessed but feeble attractions for the Cypriots who minded only about their liberty to administer their households. The people neither understood nor appreciated the new ordinances and institutions and the British Commissioners were always bitterly critical of the local reaction to their political experimentation and reformatory spirit. Burke, reflecting on the real causes that postponed the introduction of modern methods of agriculture, upon which the prosperity of the country depended, judged that the Cypriots themselves should be held responsible. ‘They were too poor, too ignorant, and too unenterprising to engage in anything of the nature of an experiment.’ The same author believed that the ‘spectacle of capable and high-minded British officers performing their duties . . . , the good influence of their home life and presence of refined and cultivated English ladies in the country, the very sports and pastimes of this new governing class’ would materially aid the population to get free from their pertinacious ignorance. After all one is not surprised to see that the Victorian narrator presented the Cypriot in the guise of a Hobbesian solitary, self-centred peasant, an extreme individualist. Before

53. Lang, ‘Cyprus — is it worth keeping?’ 445; Cyprus: its History, its Present Resources, and Future Prospects (London 1878) 204, 207.
the establishment of the British rule the Cypriots, though heavily taxed by the Turkish administration, were virtually left alone, as in an imagined *state of nature*, to secure the means of subsistence and organise the primitive way of their life. Thus inevitably the number of homicides, murder and animal stealing had been increasing dreadfully.

The British Commissioners freshly settled in the island experienced on many occasions the consequences of the primitive, extreme, individualist morality of the Cypriots. Needless to say, the selfish principles on which the natives acted stemmed from the hard struggle to secure their self-preservation and survive in an undeveloped civil environment. Constance Gordon-Cumming narrates in detail the disastrous results of the locust marches in the fields of the country. The trees and large vineyards, orchards of olive and fig, all promising an abundant harvest, afforded, after the gigantic locust swarms, a melancholy sight of 'naked branches. The British governors thus undertook to exterminate the destructive insects. Prior to them, the Turkish authorities under the auspices of Said Pasha, threatened by the financial stagnation that emerged from the catastrophe, enforced a regulation in 1867 to the effect that every man who was subject to taxation should collect one kilo of locust's eggs. The enactments were bitterly opposed by the people 'from a selfish conviction that such labour *only* benefits the public, and that fresh hordes of locusts will speedily come from other estates to replace those killed, and so they are wasting their individual labour for the general weal —a truly patriotic spirit!'\(^5\).

For Gordon-Cumming the conduct of the Cypriots pointed to the existence of an uncivilised society, showing scarcely any sense of solidarity. It should be observed however, that it was the very magnitude of the calamity which paralysed any effort on the part of the poor peasants. Eventually the Archbishop 'who was well acquainted with this characteristic of his flock', urged the governors to compel the apathetic peasants to assist in the labour of destruction.\(^6\)

The want of solidarity was felt to the greatest possible extent by the victims of leprosy. The infected were isolated in a deplorable place.

---

56. C.F. Gordon-Cumming, ‘The Locust War in Cyprus’, *Nineteenth Century* 14 (1883) 309. This interesting article summarises the techniques applied to exterminate the insects.
situated a mile from Nicosia, thus the travellers on their way to the capital usually had a sight of these ‘wretched beings’, as they called them. Before 1878 no medical treatment was provided to the sick as the Cypriots, as already pointed out, did not want to disturb the simplicity of their religious code, or did not care to do so. The lepers were condemned to endure a living gradual death, and yet, as Lang observed, ‘how insensible they seem to the dreadful reality’.\(^\text{58}\) Scott-Stevenson recreates vividly the circumstances surrounding the condition of the lepers and the local prejudice. It is worth citing at length: ‘When a man is first suspected of leprosy, the people go to the Mukhtar of his village and accuse him of the plague. A council is held, and the case examined. He is then torn from his family, who as a rule are his deadliest enemies; his goods are divided amongst his relatives, and he is banished from their presence for ever’.\(^\text{59}\) Similarly General Louis Palma di Cesnola, the American Consul appointed by president Lincoln shortly before his death, reported that when the faintest symptoms of leprosy appeared all relationship and friendship ended. The infected was driven from his house, provided with a blanket and some food, and sent to the ‘lepers’ village, seldom, if ever, with a word of pity, consolation, or hope’. They lived in ancient excavated tombs and in a few sheds built by themselves. ‘At every fair or festival in the island they are to be seen encamped by themselves near the roadside, entreating the charity of the passer-by.’\(^\text{60}\) Their close relatives hardly ever saw them again out of timidity and barbarity, so the Victorians judged.

That leads us to another example of utterly individualist concerns, the unmistakable sign of political underdevelopment: treasure-hunting. The peasants were unremitting in carrying out searches for ‘treasures’ (especially gold necklaces, earrings, signet rings, coins, statues) which they could sell to foreign consuls who were always enthusiastic about

\(^{58}\) Lang, ‘Cyprus’ II, 345; see also Burke, ‘What we have done for Cyprus’, 143.
antiquities. General Cesnola collected a tremendous amount of individual items, either by means of organised and systematic excavation in ancient Idalium, Curium and Paphos or through massive purchases from the ignorant and superstitious populace for trivial amounts. The American Consul’s pursuits had always been motivated by gain. Over the years he sold many items to the British, Louvre and Boston Museums, but most of the treasures were purchased by the newly established Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Cesnola, as well as Hamilton Lang, his avowed competitor in this sort of occupation, who made a valuable collection of remains chiefly from ancient Idalium (now placed in the British Museum), did not scruple on several occasions to take advantage of popular superstition. The methods used to deceive the Cypriot peasants indicate that they were unable to rationalise phenomena of seemingly supernatural dimension. When Cesnola noticed that some of his peasant employees concealed objects found during the diggings he contemplated the following stratagem: He laid upon a chair a book with engravings resembling objects he knew one of them had concealed, and told him that this book was divine, and that it could tell him whether something had been hidden. Then he showed him the engraving. ‘The amazed and convicted peasant would clap his hand on his head, or use some sign of astonishment . . . “he had a book telling him everything!” . . . In this way

61. See the interesting account of the anonymous author, ‘Cyprus’, *London Quarterly Review* 51 (1878) 392-3.
62. Regarding the ‘Cesnola Collection’ exported to various museums in Europe and America, and the methods of exploration and digging, see Cesnola’s *Cyprus* whose greatest part is devoted to these themes; also his *Salaminia. The History, Treasures, and Antiquities of Salamis in the Island of Cyprus* (London 1882). Further, see, John Myres, *The Handbook of the Cesnola Collection of Antiquities from Cyprus* (New York, 1914). The American Consul is reported to have opened not less than 15,000 tombs, within a few years of residence in Cyprus. See Gardner, ‘Ancient Cyprus’, 433.
63. About the thousands of holdings of Cypriot antiquities at the Metropolitan Museum, see Cesnola’s own *Descriptive Atlas of the Cesnola Collection of Cypriot Antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 3 vols (Boston and N.Y. 1885-1903).
64. About the ‘Lang Collection’ see his own account, in *Cyprus: its History, its Present Resources, and Future Prospects*, 331-8. Also of interest is Lang’s ‘Narrative of Excavations in a Temple at Dali (Idalium) in Cyprus’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* 11 (1878) 30-54; and R.S. Poole, ‘Observations on the Above Excavations’, in the same volume, 54-79.
I got possession of everything that had been found, without much annoyance.\textsuperscript{65}

Baker remarked sarcastically that only a few hours had elapsed after his arrival at Dali when he came to the decision that there was no object in prolonging his stay there. The ‘tombs of ancient Idalium had already been ransacked by the consuls of various nations’. One of the chief occupations ‘of the modern Cypriotes’, pointed out Baker, ‘appears to be the despoiling of the dead’.\textsuperscript{66} Percy Gardner, Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge, was astonished to notice a dozen gaping natives who watched every turn and every look of the strangers in the hope of sharing the treasures which could be found by the help of books and maps.\textsuperscript{67} Rarely in the history of modern civilised nations could a British man of letters become acquainted with such an extraordinary phenomenon of despoiling the cultural heritage of one’s own homeland. The very act could be attributed first and foremost to the illiteracy of the natives, and secondly to the extreme poverty that had worn them down. The villagers, completely drained by the taxes and having lost most of their crops from the scourge of the locusts and periodical drought, turned to persevering with diggings in the hope of discovering treasures of mythical magnitude. But whatever the background that pushed them to this abominable transaction it still opened a new chapter of critical derision.

Not only treasures from ancient tombs were sold out of poverty but also the ‘portable property’ of the family, especially the valuable jewels of the wife. The hopeless peasants, having no alternative, fell victims to the ruthless usurers from whom they were forced to borrow money at enormous interest to pay their taxes.\textsuperscript{68} The ruined peasant was sent to

\textsuperscript{65} Cesnola, \textit{Cyprus}, 127. On the excavations in Cyprus and the immoral exploitation of its antiquities, see, E. Goring, \textit{A Mischievous Pastime: Diggings in Cyprus in the Nineteenth Century} (Edinburgh 1988).
\textsuperscript{66} Baker, \textit{Cyprus as I saw it}, 53, 7.
\textsuperscript{67} Gardner, ‘Ancient Cyprus’, 431. The issue is also discussed by A.S. Murray, ‘Cyprus and Mycenae’, \textit{Nineteenth Century} 5 (1879) 112-131.
\textsuperscript{68} See the account of Meason, ‘A Fortnight in Cyprus’, 58; also Lang, ‘Cyprus’ (I) 333. Details about the poverty and increasing decay of the Cypriots are to be found in the \textit{Reports of Her Majesty’s High Commissioner for the Years 1878-1889}; and the \textit{Correspondence and Papers relating to the Administrations, Affairs, and Finances of Cyprus, 1878-1890}. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by command of Her Majesty, 1880-1890.
prison until the sale of his property. Yet it should be observed that the basic reason which intensified this state of misery had been the imposition of the so-called Turkish tribute. In the course of the Ottoman rule the tax collection system became rather flexible, inasmuch as traditionally the local officers and the clergy represented the appointed collectors, who could effectively convince their masters that the peasants were on the verge of perishing due to the continuous drought, or other natural calamities. In case of illegal increase of the tax-rates, as in the case of Izil Osman Aga in 1764, the people could resort to the Porte. On the other hand, the British enforced a rigid tax collecting system that did not permit possible exemptions, as those justified by various contingencies. The government imposed an annual tribute on an already impoverished island to represent the Sultan’s former profit from Cyprus, and which the Porte still required under the Convention’s stipulation. Britain undertook to pay to the Porte annually a sum representing the excess of Revenue over Expenditure calculated on the average of the five years preceding the date of the Convention.69 Thus a sum of almost 100,000 English pounds was now debited annually to the island’s budget revenues. Paradoxically, the tribute extracted to satisfy the Sultan’s financial requirement, never went to the Turkish exchequer, as it was retained by the British Treasury to be paid to the bond-holders of an Ottoman loan drawn in 1855.70 At the time this was the worst possible settlement and it had a twofold effect on the population of the country: first it imposed upon them a serious, and, given the circumstances, an almost unbearable hardship; and secondly it intensified the feelings of bitter disappointment in contrast to the high expectations cherished at the outset. The deputation of 1889 demonstrates unequivocally the feelings of distress and agony of the entire population of the island.

Ulick Burke readily acknowledged that the effect of the tribute was singularly crushing: ‘It is drawing the very life-blood from an already exhausted patient’, as Cyprus was then ‘entirely without capital, manufacturers, or skilled labour of any kind, with such material resources as

69. For the official details see, Cyprus Blue Book, 1887-88, 64.
70. The whole issue is very well discussed by R. Wilson, Cyprus and the International Economy (London 1992) 14-31.
she may possess entirely undeveloped, and with a population already impoverished by some four centuries of extortion’. And Lang remarked that the results after twelve years of British administrative novelties were indeed lamentable. They betray ‘a failure of the civilised Government of Great Britain to improve the material interests of a docile people who passed to its care from the most retrograde Government in the world’.71 Ironically, twelve years after the Vice-Admiral Lord John Hay hoisted the British flag in Nicosia, the Cypriots, who had initially welcomed the political change, but were now suffering great material stagnation, could recall with nostalgia the ‘better’ days of the Turkish administration. The British main concern was clearly the strategic significance of the new acquisition and not the improvement of its domestic economy. Britain’s fighting forces were now nearer the scene of Russia’s dreaded aggressions.72 As Forbes put it cynically, the Convention was stipulated ‘for our own purposes, not out of a philanthropic anxiety to cleanse the Augean stable of Asia Minor abuses’.73 Expressions of the kind, ‘see, the dark clouds are even now moving away, and Cyprus will once more stand out as fair as ever’, or ‘Here is a splendid island, the portal of a continent teaming with wealth if properly handled, both crying out to the civilised world, “Come and help us!”’, tended to prove that the best of intentions do not necessarily end up in a state of analogous practical fulfilment.74

IV

The Belgian Emile de Laveleye, a distinguished economist of his times, argued that the British possession of Cyprus revolves around the crucial issue of the progress of civilisation in the East. Under the rule of the energetic Britons, Cyprus ‘may become once more what it was in ancient times, the pearl of the Mediterranean. Are we to grumble at this? It is no advantage for England, but it is an advantage for humanity’; and

74. Fisher, Cyprus. Our new colony, 11; Lake, Ceded Cyprus, 4.
he went on to state enthusiastically: 'In the interest of universal liberty I applaud the acquisition of Cyprus'.

What the British found on their arrival might be now obvious. This brings us to the question of what they had in effect accomplished to foster civilisation in the island within twelve years. The dramatic want of infrastructure was extended to works of crucial importance for the commercial and social improvement of the island. Apart from the absence of metalled and properly repaired roads there were practically no bridges, government buildings, hospitals and prisons. In 1878 there was no Post Office in the island, or printing facilities. The British had admittedly to accomplish nothing less than a structural and social metamorphosis. Among other things they had to construct harbours and develop inland communications, to promote education, to revive agriculture and arrange irrigation, create commerce and restore the forests to their former condition. And they had, besides, to deal with the pressing issue of inducing a people of mixed race and religion to live peacefully.

The local inhabitants of the island amounted to 180,000 souls, according to the census of 1881 (73.9% Greek Orthodox and 24.4% Moslem). The annexation of the island to Britain seems to have exerted a dynamic impetus towards the growth of Greek Cypriot nationalism, which no effort was made to suppress until the Treaty of Lausanne in the 1920s. Lang, however, foresaw that civil stability would ultimately depend on the British endeavour 'to extinguish all distinctions based upon religion or race, and to classify all under the designation of Cypriotes, thus crushing the Hellenic idea, as well as Mussulman preponderance'.

There are several conflicting statements on the issue but unprejudiced historical research rather indicates that internal cohesion and peaceful coexistence had been sufficiently attained prior to 1878. I shall here confine my account to the Victorian testimony.

The Moslem inhabitants had been uneducated and unenterprising like their Christian compatriots, and commonly shared the same stubborn apathy with regard to the general welfare. As Dixon observed whether

75. E.L.V. de Laveleye, 'Two Foreign opinions on the Treaty of Berlin', 
Fortnightly Review 24 (1878) 625.
76. R.H. Laurie gives detailed information about the condition of the infrastructure, Mediterranean Directory (London 1877) vol. II.
77. Lang, 'Cyprus — is it worth keeping?' 446.
"Turk" or "Greek", they are an Eastern people, taking their pastime in an Eastern style', i.e., in the coffee-houses and the bazaars, 'discussing the latest news, and trying to turn [their] paras into piastres'. The Victorian traveller did not hesitate to recommend sarcastically a historical inquiry on the circumstances that gave rise to this inconceivable 'prevailing stupidity'. Their docile characteristics, however, offered a practical advantage: they could be easily governed. The position of the Christians had been superior to that of those dwelling in other parts of the Turkish Empire. They were allowed to have bells on their churches, and to celebrate Easter in the most demonstrative manner. Religious toleration might be attributed to the existence of the Linobambaki, men who conformed outwardly to the rites of the Moslems, but were of the same blood as the Christians, and had their children baptised secretly. But the system of government was referred to as corrupt, and as the sole aim of the officials was to enrich themselves, bribery intruded into every field of administration. Captain Savile, who published one of the best books on Cyprus, investigated the position of the Christians with regard to the administration of justice and concluded that the fact of the inadmissibility of their evidence in a Mussulman court long fostered acts of illegality and symptoms of bribery.

Many statements thus shed a disappointing light on the whole picture. These accounts turned attention to the radical differences in temper and creed that naturally separated the two races. The villages solely inhabited by the Turks were throughout the island 'generally dirty, miserable, and indicating every mark of decay'. The Christian population, Lang observed, was much more industrious than the Moslems who kept their wives in absolute seclusion and thus deprived the work force of urgently needed hands. The paralysing and oppressive administration of the Turkish Empire left no room for social and economic progress. That the Christian faith had survived despite the

79. Brown, Three Months in Cyprus, 12.
80. See Ravenstein, Cyprus, 25, 27.
81. A.R. Savile, Cyprus (London 1878) 135. As G.G. Hake remarked, 'the administration of the law was a matter of much complaint among the natives', 'Cyprus since the British Occupation', Journal of the Society of Arts 34 (1886) 793.
Ottoman oppression, and the practical exclusion of the population from the civilised world, was spoken in terms of a ‘curious fact’. The Turkish policy, according to an American essayist (on his testimony formerly serving as a Consul General in the region), was deliberately directed to fostering bitterness and religious fanaticism between races, thus preventing the likelihood of their union coming to a successful realisation, and simultaneously smashing any aspirations for independence. Similarly the experienced diplomat Lord Stratford Canning, saw the occupation of Cyprus by Britain in terms of a ‘Christian insurrection’ that should have attracted the interest in European politics. Guided by the British institutional machinery the Greeks of Cyprus would advance in numbers, knowledge and wealth, their life and property being at last guaranteed against the assaults of arbitrary caprice. Obstacles to these plans would be the infrastructural defects and the ‘ignorance, pride, and fanaticism of Turkish officials’.

During the ‘nightmare of Turkish rule’, according to the frustrating picture of the distinguished archaeologist Reginald Stuart Poole, religious fanaticism seems to have prevailed in politics. Whenever the Turks wanted to enforce a political regulation that Cypriot Christians would presumably be unwilling to comply with, they cleverly left religious differences to pave the way for it. This had constantly caused the reaction of the Orthodox Greek Church, ‘the most patriotic in the world’, and the priesthood became the natural leading caste of an awakening nation. In light of the political change of 1878 the orthodox subjects of the island, encouraged by their most spirited activists, longed to become a constituent part of the Kingdom of Greece. The indigenous Turks, confined to the major towns and occupied with trade,

84. See A.P. Stanley, ed., *Two Extracts from Stratford Canning, The Eastern Question*, being a selection from his writings during the last five years of his life (London 1881) 11-13, 47.
85. Poole, ‘Cyprus: its present and future’, 143, 147-8. Gammon went so far as to argue that the Greeks can be ‘described as rogues, the Turks as fanatics’; *Cyprus: its History and Prospects*, 17. See also, Fisher, *Cyprus. Our new colony*, 116; Lang, ‘Cyprus’ (I), 327.
KYRIACOS DEMETRIOU

watched the new developments with suspicion and uneasiness. But the neo-Moslems (as Poole called them), a class apart, formed from the descendants of converts, did not proclaim any resistance. This section of the population was of Greek origin, speaking Greek, and markedly similar in character to the native Christians. Though not anxious to return to their former faith, they were not unwilling to do so, circumstances permitting. They used to live side by side with the Christian population of the country in mixed villages that had both a church and a mosque. Characteristically, in some of the larger mixed villages there were two Mukhtars, representing the two segments of the population. According to Lang these Moslems spoke Greek as well as Turkish, ‘and live upon the most amicable terms with their Christian neighbours’.86 Yet the British administration should have extinguished the inherent disposition to transfer religious preoccupations into political life, and thereby established civil and religious liberty on a clearly distinguishable level.

The constitution of November 1882 was meant to be a radical measure towards the modernisation of the island’s political ethos and it aspired to safeguard the necessary equilibrium between the two races. The Cypriots had already forwarded (January 1882) a petition to the local Government, expressing their dissatisfaction with the progress hitherto accomplished, hardly corresponding with the minimum of their rational expectations. The British government thought the time appropriate to announce radical administrative reforms. The Order-in-Council replaced the infamous Ottoman Courts with a Supreme Court, and Assize, District and Magistrate Courts in each district. It also established a Legislative Council of six nominated official members and of twelve elected unofficial members, nine Christian and three Moslem. The Council theoretically enjoyed full legislative powers. It was implied that the Council would represent the island’s parliamentary institution.87 Its very composition, however, tended to increase the

86. Lang, ‘Cyprus’ (I), 327. See also Scott-Stevenson, Our Home in Cyprus, 92: ‘There is very little or no religious fanaticism in Cyprus’; and Savile, Cyprus, 128: the Moslems ‘live in harmony with their Christian neighbours in town and country’.

despair of the Greek Cypriots as they could not implement their own interests; the Turkish members were always inclined to comply with the officials, thus constituting a majority. After the first elections the Greek members formed a compact opposition that inflamed the antipathy ensuing from the religious and racial distinction between them and the Turkish segment. Burke informed his Victorian readership that in his judgment the ‘Cyprus constitution was a sham gift. The giver gave nothing. The recipient received that which he did not want, and was unable to put to any good use . . . Cyprus in 1881 had asked for bread, and we gave her, in response to her petition, not a stone — nothing so substantial — but a very feather, a plume of finery to stick into her poor and ragged turban’.88

V

The Victorian account of Cyprus presented aspects of a primitive society interwoven with phases of a political ethos typical of this stage of development. In many respects the melancholy statements about the island reflected the true extent of backwardness and unenlightenment. There was nothing, either institutional or artistic, to attract the admiration, or even the slightest interest, of the traveller or settler. Infrastructure was wanting, educational institutions absent, civil temper in a state of hypnosis. The island had been woefully laid barren and exhausted after centuries of Ottoman mal-administration. After twelve years of British rule the Victorians wondered what they had accomplished. The most pessimistic believed that the history ‘of our twelve years’ occupation of the island is a record of wasted opportunities, of disappointed hopes, of loss of prestige, of loss of self-respect, and of loss of that power to do good which is the proudest privilege of a great nation’.89 The discussions commonly revolved around the question of the Victorians’ political failure to regenerate Cypriot domestic life. And they still questioned the wisdom of the decision to take the island as a strategic depot, considering the large

88. Burke, ‘Cyprus’, 453. See also his equally critical remarks in ‘Cyprus under British Rule’ 397-8.
89. Burke, ‘Cyprus’, 439.
investments in material resources needed to transform the place into a valuable vehicle to supplement the empire’s essential aspirations. Yet a realistic appreciation would have shown that, though not successful in regenerating the island according to their initial aims, as the cost of administration proved unexpectedly too high, they significantly improved Cyprus in several aspects of its civil and developmental condition. Where they proved unable to cope was in communicating with the islanders and patiently accustoming them to the principles of progress. That implies that they set rather too high standards for spreading liberal political culture, without first securing the necessities of survival for the devastated population. The ordinary peasant who had long indulged in a simple life, surrounded by intellectual darkness, was little, if any, appreciative of social and civil reforms, and tended to interpret those changes in terms of another kind of oppressive rule. In response to their annoying protests, the British seem to have followed Forbes who cried out: ‘we are straightforward Britons, who love no dealing with tortuous and abortive Asian mysteries’. The exaction of the tribute pushed the islanders to the greatest material stagnation and this deterred capitalists from undertaking operations of importance in the country. Those few who dared arrive on the island, in Baker’s words ‘unfortunates who had rushed to Cyprus at the first intelligence of the British occupation, strong in expectations of a golden harvest’, left it a few months later having suffered great financial loss. The sudden withdrawal of the large military force brought about their total collapse. The frugal native Cypriots did not purchase goods at European shops, either because their products had no appeal for them, or simply out of poverty. The Anglo-Egyptian Bank, established immediately after the arrival of the British appointed officers, closed in 1885.

What is worse, the general policy of the British governors, and the political reforms applied, tended to strengthen the opposition of the native population (especially the Greek-Cypriots). As Mallock observed, the ‘policy of the Cyprian patriots has been from the beginning . . . at once consistent and simple. It has been to oppose every

91. See Baker’s account of the bankrupt merchants in Larnaca, Cyprus as I saw it, 12-4.
scheme or suggestion, no matter what, that originated with the British authorities'. It was not, however, a one-sided opposition: there had been mutual antipathy between the British rulers and their subjects. Scott-Stevenson did not hesitate to admit that 'it is doubtless true . . . that both the civil and the military authorities have a decided antipathy to the Greek portion of the population'. These feelings were especially directed against the educated Greeks who propagated patriotic and nationalist aspirations. But the typical representation of the Cypriot peasant betrayed, too, a sort of conclusive condescending estimation of their capabilities. Note how Dixon portrayed the common people of Cyprus: 'indolent, careless, and mimetic people . . . without a touch of Grecian taste. With neither beauty of body nor sense of beauty in the mind . . . — with neither large aspirations nor practical dexterity of hand, they live on, in a limpid state, like creatures of the lower types, clinging to life for life's own sake; voluptuaries of the sun and sea; holding on by simple animal tenacity through tempests, which have wrecked the nobler races of mankind'. Hogarth, similarly, did not spare caustic remarks: 'Like generations of his fathers he lives on in his flea-ridden mud hovel, and tills a stony patch of arid land, being always in debt for his taxes, and often in prison for his violence, unashamed, unambitious, and wholly unconscious that others can be ambitious or ashamed'. These accounts combined with the inference that the Cypriots' 'idea of [political] power is that of evil', understandably gave rise to a greatly pessimistic picture of the British chances of reforming Cyprus.

Victorians were, however, uniquely ambitious and uncompromising people, zealous about the successes of their empire. A few decades on the island, and especially following the mitigation of the consequences of the tribute, would show that their achievements amounted to no less than a practical restoration of the island's capabilities.

University of Cyprus

94. See the relevant discussion in A. Smith, *Through Cyprus* (London 1887) 320-332.