Mehmet Demiryürek, Stephen Boys Smith, Michalis N. Michael, Ali Efdal Özkul (eds.), *Studies on Ottoman Nicosia. From the Ottoman Conquest to the Early British Period*

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Mehmet Demiryürek, chief editor of this volume, is known for his numerous studies on the social and economic history of the Ottoman Empire and especially on the history of Ottoman Cyprus. The volume, a collection of articles on Ottoman Nicosia, is dedicated to Ronald C. Jennings, the prematurely lost American specialist in Ottoman history (author, among other works, of *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World 1571–1640*. New York University Press, New York, 1993). All but one of the articles refer to the Ottoman period (1571-1878) of Nicosia, the administrative center of Cyprus until today, and partly of Cyprus as a whole at this time.

This collection of seventeen articles is the product of a research project entitled “Ottoman Nicosia: A Social and Economic History of Cyprus, 1570-1878”, which is carried out with the support of the Hitit University of Turkey. The book consists of a prologue written by Mehmet Demiryürek, quite extensive contributors’ CVs, and seventeen articles, each of which is prefixed by an abstract and concludes with a bibliography. With the exception of two researchers, one of whom is Italian and the other British, the remaining fifteen authors are Turks and Turkish Cypriots, Greeks and Greek Cypriots. So, we are dealing with a product of mainly Greek-Turkish cooperation. After the chief editor’s prologue, which summarizes the bibliography on Ottoman Cyprus and presents the contributions, the articles themselves follow in chronological order, proceeding from the 16th to the 19th century.

Edited volumes often make a reviewer anxious of not being able to cover, in a limited space, all of their content and consequently of being unfair to the contributors. For this reason, I preferred to identify the main themes that run through the book and focus on them. As a result, some contributions, which do not fall, or fall in part, under these categories, are not presented in this review due to lack of space, but this does not mean at all that they are not important. In
my opinion, the volume has three main themes: 1. the demographic development of Nicosia, 2. the economic and social life of the island and especially of Nicosia, and 3. the more or less harmonious coexistence of Christians and Muslims on the island and in the city of Nicosia. Vera Costantini (“An Old Location’s New Life: Early-Ottoman Lefkoşa”, pp. 25-35) with constant reference to the sources – Ottoman and Venetian – vividly presents the transition from Venetian to Ottoman rule. She shows that two important cities of the island, Nicosia and Famagusta, were evacuated of their Christian population and became mainly Muslim cities, while Tuzla / Larnaca was upgraded to an important port and city of merchants and foreign consulates, since the Venetian presence in the southeastern Mediterranean anything but stopped after the Ottoman conquest of the region. Recep Dündar (“Nicosia according to the Population and Taxation Survey of 1572”, pp. 37-69) bases his detailed study mainly on the first Ottoman census of 1572 and his observations concern in part demography, but mainly the agricultural production of Nicosia, as this appears through taxation. We will return to this article, but here we have to note that his demographic observations would be more illuminating if they examined the pre-Ottoman period, in order to ascertain the relevant population fluctuations, as Costantini did. However, the article contains very useful tables with household data organised by quarters of Nicosia and by settlement on the outskirts of Nicosia. Unfortunately, no attempt is made to identify the old settlements with the current ones.

The strong point in the article of the young researcher Styliani Lepida (“Nicosia: The Capital City of an Ottoman Province in the Seventeenth Century”, pp. 101-116) is the thorough study of Ottoman poll tax registers (cizye defterleri) during the 17th century which establishes that the Christian population of Nicosia and its villages steadily declined from 30,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the century to 14,000 at the end of the century. The article by Mehmet Demiryürek and Hakan Yazar (“Nicosia According to the Census of 1831”, pp. 281-363) gives important demographic data for Nicosia in the first half of the 19th century, while in extensive tables it summarizes the contents of the 1831 census. Gökhan Kaya’s study (“Some Characteristics of the Population of Nicosia During the Early Period of British Rule”, pp. 399-415), in addition to presenting the growing demographic trends of Cyprus during the early British period (1878-1911), makes a relatively large review of the demographic development of Cyprus from the Lusignan era to the early 20th century summarizing the existing literature.

The second topic of the volume is the economic and social history of the island and especially of Nicosia. The article by Recep Dündar, to which we have already referred on the occasion of demography, is an important contribution to the study of the mainly agricultural production of Nicosia and its surroundings based on the first Ottoman census of 1572. Agricultural and livestock production as well as the taxes imposed on it are discussed in detail. It is unfortunate that no reference is made to Ronald Jennings’ first contribution to this subject,71 neither in the article nor in the literature at the end of it. For example, there is a confusion about the amount of Nicosia’s tax revenue: while R. Jennings gives the amount of 155,390 akçe, R. Dündar in the table

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he publishes (p. 40) gives the amount of 147,000 akçe, while at another place (p. 41) he raises this amount to 195,390 akçe without adequately explaining this increase. Moreover, while R. Jennings notes that some of Nicosia’s revenues were rented out under the tax farming system (mukataa), this is not mentioned here. Further, R. Dünder, discussing the revenues from Nicosia, includes a category that creates a problem: the capital tax (cizye) of all areas of Cyprus, something that is completely absent from the study of R. Jennings. These are some of the issues that a reference to the article by R. Jennings might have addressed. Finally, it should be noted that ispençe was a type of poll tax and was not related to the tithe on agricultural production (as claimed on p. 52 of the article).

Mehmet Demiryürek’s article (“The Price of the Faith: Mukataa-i Patrikiyye-i Cezire-i Kıbris and Mukataa-i Şem’hane 1572-1612”, pp. 79-99) is extremely enlightening. Although it deals with two specific taxes paid by the Christians of the island through utilizing ruşnamçe, i.e. a kind of Ottoman accounting books for tax farms, it also clarifies some important issues of a general nature regarding the administrative and economic organization of the island immediately after the fall to the Ottomans. What is particularly interesting is that the author is trying to show that these taxes were not high. By comparing the prices of different food items, he concludes that these taxes were quite low. Mustafa Öztürk’s article (“Cypriot Houses and Life at Home in the 17th Century”, p. 117-134) deals mainly with the social life on the island in this period. Based on court records, he attempts to describe contemporary Cypriot houses and the social conditions of the people who lived in them. Indeed, through specific examples he demonstrates some characteristics of the houses. From inheritance records (tereke) he obtains important information about eating habits, clothing, slaves, concubines, adultery, how many people lived in the house, how many women a man had, and so on. When discussing divorce, he says the divorced woman had to stay at her former husband’s house or under the protection of another respectable person until she was allowed to remarry. But he does not tell us when a divorced woman could remarry. The answer is as soon as her next period came and it could be established that she was not pregnant by her former husband. A pregnancy would have further legal complications. No distinction is made, for example, between talak divorces, i.e. on the initiative of the husband, and hul divorces, i.e. at the request of the wife. In the latter case, however, these were often divorces that women had been forced to seek in order to release the husband of the obligation to pay that portion of the dowry he was obliged to pay in the event of divorce. It is quite strange that in the court records of 17th century Cyprus no reference is made to such cases.

The socio-economic theme of the volume includes the article by Theoharis Stavrides (“Ottoman Nicosia Besieged: Sieges and Blockades of Nicosia in the Long Eighteenth Century”, pp. 197-217) despite the fact that the latter examines three cases of siege or blockade of Nicosia by insurgents during the 18th century. The author manages to give in a brilliant way a sharp description of the upheavals. Despite the detailed account the overall narrative is very clear. The second part of the article analyzes the strategies used by the besiegers in these three cases. When discussing these strategies, the author finds the opportunity to make important observations regarding the social and economic history of the island during the 18th century. This is a very good example of both using unpublished material and conversing with the published literature. The topic chosen is interesting, but even more stim-
ulating is the way it is handled, because it is not limited to describing some military-political crises, instead, based on these it makes important observations concerning a variety of socio-economic issues ranging from the geography and rural economy of the island to the position of women and the role of European consuls on the island in the 18th century.

The third theme of the volume is defined by those contributions that place weight on the more or less harmonious coexistence of Christians and Muslims on the island. Kemal Çiçek (“A Quest for Justice in a Mixed Society: The Muslims and the Orthodox Cypriots Before the Sharia Court of Nicosia”, pp. 135-164) examines seven court registers of Cyprus in the early 18th century and draws important conclusions, some of which, however, are so exaggerated that they run the risk of losing their persuasive power. From the examples given by the author it becomes clear that the Christian inhabitants of the island often resorted to the court of the kadı even for cases that could be settled within their own religious community. However, the author stretches the evidence when he concludes that “from these cases we learn that Orthodox Cypriots did not hesitate to sue anyone, even military officials, because they knew that the kadı would always strive diligently to protect their interests” (p. 141, the emphasis is mine). Or, to give another example: “as can be seen, the kadı never gave his final verdict without sound and reliable evidence against Orthodox zimmis, and he always defended their rights” (p. 146, the emphasis is mine). There is no need for special argumentation against such excessively articulated views especially when a pre-modern legal system, such as that of the Ottoman Empire, is concerned. In his conclusions Kemal Çiçek criticizes Ronald Jennings' view that the reason why the zimmis resorted to the kadı so often was probably the insecurity they felt and their need to have evidence of the state in their hands. According to the author, we should rather look for the reason in the confidence that the zimmis felt in the justice of the kadı. This might well be so, but that is no reason to reject the view of R. Jennings or even neglect other views like the one expressed by the British diplomat Thomas Sandwith (later discussed in Stephen Boys Smith’s contribution to this volume): In his report on the situation of Christians in Cyprus in the second half of the 19th century, Sandwith says that because members of the Ottoman courts were prone to bribery, many wealthy Christians resorted to them to ‘find their right’ by paying (p. 384). If this were true of the 19th century, could it not be partly true of the 18th century as well?

In the same vein is the article by Ali Efdal Özkal (“Intercommunal Relations in Cyprus under Ottoman Rule in the 18th Century”, pp. 165-189), formulating the position that in 18th century Cyprus there were no serious inter-communal conflicts and this was due to the tolerance of the Ottoman administration. Despite the title of the article, in the first half of the study examples are given from the court records which concern the relations of Muslims with Muslims and Christians with Christians. The second half examines cases of disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims over land and pastures (examples are cited in which non-Muslims are proven right), water use, trade associations, among others. It also concludes that cases of violence between Muslims and Non-Muslims are similar to those within the same religious community. It also looks at inter-faith marriages and how some of them ended in divorce. He concludes that mixed marriages (i.e., Muslim men marrying Christian women) were a means of assimilating Christians into the Islamic community. One main, rather exaggerated, conclusion of the study is that through-
out the Ottoman rule on Cyprus only 515 people converted to Islam and therefore there was no violent Islamisation or mass conversions to Islam. The only reference in the judicial records, according to the author, which signals a negative discrimination against non-Muslims is that they were allowed to use the public baths only on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

The following two articles continue the theme of the harmonious coexistence of Muslims and non-Muslims in a similar way. They both address the issue of the Orthodox elite of the island. The article by Euphrosyne Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou (“An Alternative Ethnology: Lifestyle and Behavior of the Orthodox Elite in Ottoman Nicosia, 1775-1821”, pp. 231-259) explores the life of the Orthodox elite of Nicosia in the 18th century through the architecture of houses, their furniture, their eating and clothing habits. It is an ‘alternative ethnology’ insofar as it examines the lives of the rich and not of everyday people as traditional ethnology does. This is an innovative study that uses both artistic representations and written testimonies to conclude that the Orthodox elite of Nicosia was largely integrated into the lifestyle of the Ottoman elite. This study could very well be completed by the lists of inheritance records (tereke defterleri) that are preserved among the court records of the Ottoman judiciary. In addition, since the author seems to pay special attention – very reasonably – to the social and cultural significance of clothing (the Ottoman clothing of the Orthodox elite occupies an important part of the article), the absence from the bibliography of an important book in this area is unfortunate.  

Michalis Michael’s article (“Dependency / Autonomy, Power and Ideologies in Ottoman Nicosia at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century”, pp. 261-279), based on Greek and Ottoman sources, convincingly argues that Cyprus and its Orthodox elite at the beginning of 19th century was largely self-governing, almost independent of central Ottoman power, but not in opposition to it. On the contrary, it maintained its Ottoman character to such an extent that it seems that Archbishop Kyprianos did not respond to the Filike Etaireia’s request for help, precisely because he saw himself and the Orthodox elite in Cyprus as part of an ‘Ottomanness’ against which the Greek War of Independence was turning. M. Michael in his attempt to show the close relations of the local Cypriot Orthodox elite with the Sublime Porte contributes, among other conclusive evidence, the following to the discussion: Archbishop Kyprianos caused his immediate appointment by the central government (in two places he writes: “the direct appointment by the Sublime Porte – the direct involvement of the Sublime Porte”). It is not sufficiently clear what is meant by these expressions, but we must note here that this was the normal procedure: through the mediation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, an imperial diploma (berat) appointing the ecclesiastical lord was issued by the central Ottoman authority. Consequently, the direct involvement of the central government is not necessarily a safe indicator in this case.

Stephen Boys Smith’s article (“Thomas Sandwith: A Consul’s View of Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cyprus”, pp. 377-397) gives us a brilliantly vivid picture of Cyprus and its troubles in the second half of the 19th century through the reports of a British diplomat on the island. His remarks cover a wide range of issues, from trade and the economy to crime and the serious problems of locusts and drought. In one report – written when
asked to describe the situation of Christians on the island – he says that Christians are disadvantaged in various ways, but the most important thing is that there is a bad administration that affects Christians and Muslims alike (p. 384).


This is an important volume that contributes significantly to our knowledge of Ottoman Cyprus. A balanced mixture of experienced and early career researchers offers new materials and/or new approaches to already existing data on the Ottoman period of Nicosia and Cyprus in general. Among the negatives of the book I would like to note the often-misspelled Greek names, mainly toponyms. Also, a comprehensive index at the end would be a valuable tool.

Georgios Salakidis


The phase of consular collecting on Cyprus in the mid-1800s, memorably characterised as a ‘mischievous pastime’ in Elizabeth Goring’s book,\textsuperscript{73} is well known to historians of Cypriot archaeology thanks in particular to the efforts of Olivier Masson and other contributors to the Cahiers du Centre d’Études Chypriotes over the years, who have helped to set Cypriot archaeology in its broader historical and diplomatic context. Consuls from France, America, Italy, Germany and Britain, alongside other expatriates and local collectors, collaborated or competed in more or less friendly rivalry to explore ancient sites and extract objects, many of which were transported overseas. One participant in this quasi-archaeological activity was the British Vice-Consul, Thomas Backhouse Sandwith (1831-1900), who served in Cyprus between 1865 and 1870. Best known for his insightful description of the contents of ancient Cypriot tombs, published by the London Society of Antiquaries in 1877,\textsuperscript{74} Sandwith brought an enquiring mind and strong powers of observation and description to his explorations in Cyprus. Now, through this meticulous and thorough account of Sandwith’s lengthy consular career, his approach to Cyprus, its people and its antiquities can be understood in the broader context of his life and work.

Stephen Boys Smith, a historian and formerly one of the UK’s top-ranking civil servants, and a descendant of Sandwith, has conducted extensive research to produce a detailed and well-rounded account of Sandwith’s life and consular career. The volume is organised chronologically, following Sandwith from his early life to his initial experiences of consular work – unpaid service on the margins of the Crimean War, and in Syria – and through successive posts in Caiffa (1861-1865), Cyprus (1865-1870), Crete (1870-1885),


\textsuperscript{74} T. B. Sandwith, “On the different styles of pottery found in ancient tombs in the island of Cyprus”. Archaeologia 45, 1877, pp. 127-142.