Stephen BOYS SMITH, *Thomas Sandwith. A British Consul in the Levant 1855-1891*

Anna Reeve
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, 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, 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 Caïfa (1861-1865), Cyprus (1865-1870), Crete (1870-1885),

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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.
Sandwith’s career offers the opportunity to examine the evolution of the consular service and the development of British foreign policy in the Levant, while also bearing witness to the different societies and institutions among which he lived and worked. At times he played an important part in events, for example in brokering the Pact of Chalepa in Crete in 1878, for which he was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath by the British Government. One striking aspect of his consular duties was the sheer range of subjects on which the Foreign Office actively sought information, including regular bulletins on trade, shipping, industry, agriculture, and taxation, as well as periodical requests on subjects such as slavery or the relative treatment of Christians within the Ottoman Empire. Anything which might impinge on British interests or influence was of concern, requiring a steady stream of reports. All these were carefully filed, resulting in the preservation by the UK National Archives of a large body of Sandwith’s writing.

Although Sandwith left little in the way of a personal archive, Boys Smith has made full use of these Foreign Office records, alongside a wide range of other sources, to create a detailed reconstruction of the events which Sandwith witnessed, reported, and at times actively influenced. Boys Smith also draws extensively on contemporary sources, including travellers’ accounts, fiction, reports in periodicals, and visual art, to create a plausible evocation of what Sandwith would have seen and experienced on his travels and in his daily life in his consular postings. This rich social history is especially valuable in creating a vivid impression of time and place for non-specialists, and rounds out the testimony of the official reports, in which Sandwith’s personal views and opinions are, by convention, largely suppressed. As a result, Boys Smith is able to sustain a highly detailed narrative of Sandwith’s career, complementing his directly reported observations with a wealth of additional information.

Due to this meticulous and wide-ranging research, this volume goes far beyond a biography of one individual to provide an insightful analysis of the various political, social and economic circumstances in which Sandwith worked, against the backdrop of the late Ottoman world and the broader Eastern Question. Sandwith’s service provides a lens through which to examine the history of the Levant, and his movement between posts allows a comparative perspective. While the primary focus is on British policy and practice, Sandwith’s testimony does not stand unchallenged but is critically examined in the light of other evidence, resulting in a balanced picture. As a result, this volume has much to offer the reader who is interested in the history of the region, and specifically the places in which Sandwith worked.

Sandwith’s contribution to the pre-history of Cypriot archaeology was strangely overlooked for a long time, but was definitively rehabilitated by Robert Merrillees and is now recognised as an early and largely successful attempt to classify the contents of Cypriot tombs, based on close observation. What is perhaps less well known is the extent to which this ground-breaking paper was the product of Sandwith’s personal characteristics and training as a career diplomat, qual-

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ities apparent throughout his life and work, and not just in his single archaeological publication. His sympathy for those in desperate circumstances, for example due to excessive taxation, manifest throughout his career, motivated him to pay local people to undertake digging for antiquities, and his highly developed abilities to consolidate data and lucidly set out his findings underpinned the production of his paper. His relatively modest explorations were productive of new knowledge as well as social benefit in the form of paid employment for Cypriots suffering the effects of famine, facts which challenge simplistic narratives of imperial exploitation by the participants in the ‘mischievous pastime’ or indeed the activities of privileged foreign residents more generally. This volume also provides a detailed account of Sandwith’s involvement with archaeology in Crete, although he left no published writing on the subject; he collected antiquities, some of which ended up in the British Museum, and elsewhere, and recognised the potential of the site of Knossos, although he was unable to convince Charles Newton to excavate.

Boys Smith also refers to a diary kept by Sandwith of a cruise on the Nile, undertaken after retirement with his daughter, and taking in museums and excavations; it is anticipated that this will form a future publication, which will undoubtedly shed more light on Sandwith’s archaeological interests. These were, however, only a small part of his experiences, and Boys Smith’s account, with its rich social history and ringside view of key developments in the Levant over four decades, is highly valuable in enabling historians of archaeology to broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of the political and socio-economic contexts, both local and regional, within which early archaeological investigations took place. Biographies such as this help to differentiate the varied priorities and approaches of individuals tangentially engaged in archaeology, and demonstrate the potential of largely untapped archival resources to add to historical knowledge and cast a raking light on archaeological activities in the imperial and colonial periods. The present volume can be highly recommended to those seeking a more nuanced understanding of the contexts within which consuls operated in Cyprus and beyond, and an overview of the history of the Levant in the late Ottoman period, through the lens of the British consular service.

Anna Reeve


Marilena Varnava’s *Cyprus before 1974: The Prelude to Crisis* focuses on an examination of developments concerning the Cyprus problem in the post independence period up until the Turkish invasion of 1974. While existing historiography tends to highlight the impact of external factors in the evolution of the Cyprus problem, Varnava’s analysis adopts a fresh approach.
