



**Near East University
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
English Language and Literature Department**

**A CRITICAL APPROACH TO LAWRENCE DURRELL'S
ATTITUDE TOWARD THE TURKISH RULE
AND THE TURKISH CYPRIOTS IN *BITTER LEMONS OF CYPRUS***

**Prepared by : Tüzün E. Çöklü
Supervised by: Dr Gül Celkan
Lefkosa, 1994**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I. Preface

II. Introduction

III. Cyprus Under the Turks

IV. Cyprus Under the British

V. British Policy Toward the Two Communities

VI. Lawrence Durrell and *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus*

VII. Conclusion

VIII. Bibliography

PREFACE

After reading Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* from the stand point of a Turkish Cypriot, I felt it a great necessity to carry out a research on the Cyprus problem, and to analyse *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* as the subject matter of my master's thesis.

The books written so far on Cyprus give a glimpse of the island from two different perspectives: Cyprus as a green and wonderful island like paradise, and Cyprus as an island of wars, problems and disputes. It is really impossible to tell whether there is another island like Cyprus that serves as a homage to such two contrary characteristics. Maybe it is the misfortune of such a beautiful island to witness such bitter and severe problems which still continue, and cause the island to project as a "troubled island" in the agenda of the world towards the 21st century.

In *Bitter Lemons of Cyprus* Durrell explained the problematic years 1953-56, during which the Greek Cypriot desire and struggle for union with Greece reached its highest point. It is sad to say, the Turkish Cypriots are almost ignored, moreover reflected in a negative way although they were present in the island during these years, and were having problems with the Greek Cypriots.

As I was working on my thesis I faced lots of difficulties especially in finding source books that cover the 1953-56 period. This situation led me to come to the point that a lot of research need to be done on the history of Cyprus.

As a literary scholar, it is my obligation to be as objective as possible; however, the information relating only the facts of the time will contribute greatly to Turkish Cypriot history, as not much has been noted about the Turkish Cypriot population, and as they have always been

1981

treated as second-class citizens by the British Government and the Greek Cypriot community from the very start. It is our most sincere wish to relay the events as close to the realities as possible to prevent doubts about the unprejudiced attitude of the author.

INTRODUCTION

Cyprus, with an area of 3572 square miles, lying 40 miles south of Türkiye, 650 miles south-east of Greece, 77 miles west of Syria, and 300 miles north of the United Arab Republic, has always been a centre of interest of many nations throughout history because of its strategic position. The island has been ruled by many different nations: Caliphate (647-649), Byzantine (649-802), Caliphate (802-963), Byzantine (963-1184), The Crusades (1184-1192), The Lusignans (1192-1489), Venetians (1489-1571), The Ottoman Empire (1571-1878), Great Britain (1878-1960). The island has been bought and sold, transferred from one ruler to another. The rulers having the dominance in this part of the world also tried to keep Cyprus under control. The inhabitants were always treated as slaves. The Lusignan, and the following 380 years of Venetian rule, in many respects, were the worst period in the history of Cyprus.¹ The Catholic Latins (Lusignan and Venetian) were very severe to the Greek Orthodox community in the island. Sir George Hill in the second volume of his *A History of Cyprus* calls this period "The Frankish Period" and describes the oppression of the native Cypriots and the heavy taxes, "Taxation for tribute stripped the wretched inhabitants of what the raiding enemy had left them." Greek Cypriot Alastos says that during the Lusignan period;

"Economically, socially, and culturally the island was horizontally divided into two separate and distinct sections. At the top was the feudal class, mostly French in origin, and the foreign merchants, mostly Italians, and at the bottom Greek Cypriot natives, mostly serfs or labourers. The division extended to religion and language.. the part played by the Lusignans in building up the civilization of Cyprus was practically nil. Whatever they did was for the glory and gratification of the alien; feudal order began to disappear with their passing, to be completely swept away with the conquest by the Turks in 1570-1."²

¹ Ahmet C. Gazioğlu, *The Turks in Cyprus* (London: K. Rüstem & Brother, 1990), p. 7.

² Idem.

As Alastos mentions above, after the Ottoman conquest, the inhabitants of Cyprus were freed from the status of being serfs, were given the right to acquire property and land, were exempted from unjust taxes and given the freedom of worshipping in their own churches. It was during the Ottoman reign that the Turks were settled in the island which caused bitter wars and struggles in the following and upcoming years. The Ottoman Empire never adopted the policy of colonization upon the inhabitants as in the example of Cyprus. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire, for the first time in Cyprus' history, established a civil administration based on the popular vote.³ The reign of the Turks partly ended with a secret convention between Britain and the Ottoman Empire- as Russia started to be a threat- and the island was transferred to the British Crown, then annexed in 1914 and in 1925, once again became a colony until it gained its independence in 1960.

Bitter Lemons of Cyprus by Lawrence Durrell traces the troubled years 1953-56 of Cyprus under the British rule. In this master's thesis, his views and opinions of the British politics, his attitude towards the three communities living on the island- British, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot-, and his approach to the previous reigns, especially the reign of the Ottoman Empire will be elaborated on more with the hope of enlightening the misunderstandings and prejudices stemming from both the reign of Turks and the Turkish Cypriots.

Bitter Lemons of Cyprus is not only a work of literature but a novel dealing with the historical, cultural, sociological past of the island. As most literary critics accept, literature has close links with all the diciplines. Bearing this in mind, the novel will be treated as a work reflecting the historical events that took place during 1953-56. However, in order to understand and appreciate the novel better, and to judge it objectively, it was a must to refer to history books which relate the incidents that occured at the time. Moreover, in order to eliminate any kind of prejudiced statements about

³ Ibid., p. 100.

either one of the communities the book deals with, different books have been skimmed through to be able to agree with or refute Durrell's points.

It should not be thought that this work relates mostly to history; on the contrary, it integrates the two disciplines, i. e., literature and history. Durrell needed historical references to make his book readable and factual. The writer of this work aims to point out by analysing the historical past, to what extent Durrell was impartial, unprejudiced and objective while putting pen to paper.

As a result, while analysing a work of art, it is a must to understand the three important terms: literary theory, criticism and history. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature* state that, " The term 'theory of literature' includes the necessary 'theory of literary criticism' and 'theory of literary history". They go on saying that, " ...the methods so designated cannot be used in isolation, that they implicate each other so thoroughly as to make inconceivable literary theory without criticism or history, or criticism without theory and history, or history without theory and criticism."⁴

As mentioned above, the importance of history in literature can neither be denied nor isolated, but, it is argued that literary history has its own peculiar standarts and criteria -those of the other ages.⁵ We must therefore be able to enter into the minds of the authors, uderstand their attitudes and analyse their works accordingly, excluding the intrusions of our own conceptions. E.E. Stoll works on the theory that, the reconstruction of the author's intention is the central purpose of literary history.⁶ It is important to analyse a work of art by referring to the values of its own time. A literary historian cannot deny the importance of criticism, similarly, a critic cannot deny the importance of history as they over-lap.

⁴ Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Liteature* (England: Penguin Group, 1993), p. 39.

⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

In conclusion, if a critic ignores the historical relationships, his judgement will not be complete. As Rene Wellek and Austin Warren say in *Theory of Literature* a critic "could not know which work is original and which derivative; and, through his ignorance of historical conditions, he would constantly blunder his understanding of specific works of art."⁷

These views have acted as the starting point for the attitude taken by the writer toward the work. Hence, certain historical information will comprise part of the chapters to relate solely the entire truth, to delete any doubtful questions from the readers' mind.

⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

CYPRUS UNDER THE TURKS

After the conquest of Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire started to expand by adding provinces as well as numerous islands to its territories in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean areas. At the time, only Cyprus was under the control of a foreign state. It was an island which could provide logistic support for the Turkish armies during their expeditions in North Africa and in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus was situated at the crossroads of international trade between the East and West, and if the island remained in hostile hands then it could be used as a supply point for military attacks against the Ottoman Empire.

Apart from these political and logistic reasons, the oppression of the inhabitants also played an important role in the Ottoman conquest. Sir George Hill in the second volume of *A History of Cyprus* states that under the Lusignian rule, the native Cypriots were divided into three classes: *Parici*, *Perperiarii*, and *Lefteri*.

The lowest class was called *Parici*. This class had to pay annual *per capita* tax, and also work for two days each week for their lords without pay. "They were treated as mere chattels, and their lords could inflict on them any sort of punishment short of mutilation or death."¹

Perperiarii was the name of the second class. The people in this class had risen from the *parici* " by compounding with Dukes and Katapans " and had become " freeman " as far as their own persons and their children were concerned. Most of the civil servants and the wealthy citizens of Nicosia belonged to this class.

The third class was called *lefteri*. This class consisted of *parici* who had been emancipated by making a payment of money. They were free to use

¹ Sir George Hill, *A History of Cyprus* (Cambridge University Press, 1948), Vol. II, pp. 6-7.

their lands and crops but still had to surrender between one fifth and one tenth of their crops to the lord who had set them free.²

The Orthodox Greek Cypriots were the ones who suffered in every way during the Lusignan period as their freedom of worship was curtailed. In return, the Latin Church was in a superior position over other churches. As a result, the local people and the lower classes started to leave the island in order to escape from this oppression. The Venetians were hated so much that, two Cypriots went to Istanbul " to plead with the Sultan to take the island under his protection."³ These political, and logistic reasons resulted in the 1571 Turkish expedition.

Following the conquest, there was a marked decline in the population of Cyprus. Some of the inhabitants who had left their homes, went to the mountains in order to be safe. After hostilities had ceased, some chose to remain in their homes but some stayed on the mountains. As the inhabitants began to evacuate the island, houses and farms were left fully abandoned. These were mostly Latin people who had been engaged in trade or had been supporters of Venetian rule.⁴

In 1572, a general registration was carried out, and it was found out that in the Mesarea plain and Mazoto areas 76 villages were completely abandoned. ⁵ These results caused the Sultan, Selim II at the time, to order the resettlement of Anatolian Turks in Cyprus, a decision which indirectly caused many problems in the history of the island. Ahmet C. Gazioglu in *The Turks in Cyprus* explains the main purpose of the resettlement by saying "it is not to colonize the island but to help it recover from the destruction of war and make good its deficiencies." Parallel to what he says, people skilled in crafts and trades, such as tailors, weavers, silk dyers and manufacturers,

² Ahmet C. Gazioglu, *The Turks in Cyprus* (London: K. Rüstem & Brother, 1990), p.4.

³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵ Idem.

shoemakers, saddlers, tanners, carpenters, master builders, stone cutters, and goldsmiths were selected to settle in the island. It was estimated that by the end of the 17th century, the population transferred from Türkiye to Cyprus was more than thirty thousand.⁶ This resettlement resulted in the formation of mixed communities. Sir Harry Luke, an authority on the Turkish period of the island's history, explains his views about the resettlement as follows:⁷

"... The Turks thus became a permanent element of the population of Cyprus. They refrained from intermarriage with their Orthodox compatriots...But they have maintained relations with their Greek Christian neighbours which, if not intimate, were on the whole amicable."⁸

During the reign of the Ottoman Empire a rule established by tradition stated that, when a land was occupied, a Bey was to be appointed to look after the civil administration and a Cadi (judge) to administer all religious matters. The Bey represented the political and executive authority of the Sultan, and the Cadi upheld religious law and the imperial regulations.

For the first time in Cyprus' history, a civil administration was established based on the popular vote. Under the Turkish rule each village in the island was a "Rustic Republic" living its own life, obeying its own chief, and upholding its own local law. Hepworth Dixon, the British administrator and officer who visited Cyprus in the first years of the British occupation says that:

⁶ Ibid., p. 78.

⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

"Like a commune in canton Schweiz or canton Zurich, every Cyprian hamlet has a local rule based on the purest form of democracy. The villagers are free and equal. Their democratic power is good in every way; the peasants, meeting in their free assemblies, have the right to choose not only their rulers but their spiritual leaders. The villagers elect the village pope... Self-government here is perfect. All that the Caimacams and financial officers can do is to assess their district and the individual villages in their district. How the taxes shall be apportioned-how each farm and cabin, church and sheep run shall be rated-is for the villagers, through their elected headmen and elders, to arrange for themselves."⁹

The status and Administrative Organization of the island changed several times during the three hundred years of Turkish rule. In the 1830s Turkish rule in Cyprus reached a turning-point by the granting of more autonomy to the Cypriots in economic as well as political affairs.¹⁰ In 1830 an Assembly was held in which, with the support of the Archbishop, the governor made substantial tax reduction which gave the Greek community considerable tax relief. Ahmet Gazioglu in *The Turks in Cyprus* says that "the Assembly, led by the Archbishop and attended by the metropolitans and locally elected Greek members, was a local parliament or a communal chamber which dealt with local affairs and taxation. The Bishops were again responsible for the assessment and collection of the tribute."¹¹

In 1815, Wiliam Turner, an English diplomat, visited the island and in his *Journal of a Tour in the Levant* quotes a Greek priest who told him "Turks in Cyprus were very sociable and friendly to the Christians."

Starting from 1571, the Turks introduced their own system of administration, together with the traditional institutions of Moslem Turkish

⁹ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

society relating to religious, cultural and economic affairs. On the other hand, they did not interfere with the established traditions or the way of life, religion, or culture of the existing inhabitants. In judicial organs, and in the municipal councils, the number of the members - Moslems and Christians - were equal. Ahmet Gazioglu in *The Turks in Cyprus* says;

"The Greek Cypriots were effectively their own masters. Great advances were made, particularly during the last forty to forty-five years of Turkish rule, when reform after reform was introduced in the island, raising the standard of living of the inhabitants to European levels."¹²

Under the Turkish rule, the Greek Cypriots were given the right to establish their own system of public education. The policy of non-interference in the public and private education enabled the Greek Cypriots to improve the standard of general education for their community.

The Orthodox church and the Archbishop was recognized by the Turks, the leader of the Greeks in temporal affair. These great powers obtained by the church during the Turkish rule were going to have important implications for the future.

In conclusion, although there were some problems and deficiencies, the 308 years of Turkish rule can be accepted as the most peaceful and democratic years that the Cypriots had when compared with the Lusignan and the British reign. Nancy Crawshaw in *The Cyprus Revolt* points out these peaceful years of the two communities and says, "Except for occasional clashes the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities lived in peace for more than three hundred years, finding at times common ground in their joint hostility to the harsh taxation imposed by the Sultan."¹³

¹² Ibid., p. 111.

¹³ Nancy Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt* (London: William Clowes & Sons Ltd., 1978), p. 20.

CYPRUS UNDER THE BRITISH

The main reason which led Britain to gain control of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire was strategic, reinforced by political ambitions in the Middle East. In 1878, with a secret convention called "The Cyprus Convention" held between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, the island transferred to the British Crown.¹ With this treaty, the Ottoman Empire allowed Great Britain to take over the administration of the island while it continued to retain sovereignty over the island, in return for a British promise to support the Ottoman Empire against a Russian attack on her. Dr. Stavros Pantelli in *The Making of Modern Cyprus* explains the importance of the island for Britain as follows:

"As to its strategic importance Cyprus directly commanded the entrance to the Suez Canal, the coasts of Palestine and Syria, and the southern provinces of Asia Minor. With Gibraltar in the west of the Mediterranean, Malta in the centre and now Cyprus, the process of converting it into a distant "**British Lake**" was complete, and with Britain henceforth the chief advisor and comforter to the Porte, its moral influence among all the nations of the east, and especially the people of India, was considerably increased. Economically and commercially, Cyprus once more, brought many advantages to its new occupier. For 82 years this "rosy realm of Venus" remained the most valuable possessions of the British."²

By the convention, Great Britain acquired *de facto*, if not *de jure*, sovereignty in Cyprus. Yet Great Britain never disputed the legal sovereignty of Turkiye. It has been asserted that, until the Annexation, she refused to extend the protection of her Consuls to Cypriot residents outside the island. But it is said that the natives of Cyprus are entitled to British

¹ Dr. Stavros Pantelli, *The Making of Modern Cyprus* (England: Interworld publications Ltd., 1990), p.70.

² Idem.

protection from the Turkish dominions, but are not to be regarded as British subjects.

The period, starting from the occupation in 1878 till the annexation in 1914, is called "the years of uncertainty". Writers on international law agreed that any part of the territory of a State which is under the administration of another state falls within the theatre of war between the administering State and another Power. Thus even before its annexation in 1914 Cyprus would have been included in the theatre of war if that war was waged by Great Britain, but not if it was the case of a war between Türkiye and any other Power than Great Britain.³ Sir George Hill in the fourth volume of *The History of Cyprus* explains the question that aroused from the convention by quoting Sir R. Phillimore's comments:

"Cyprus is ceded by the Porte for the purposes of **occupation and administration** by England. These terms are the same as those employed in the recent transfer of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Austria, who has now established her authority over those provinces after much bloodshed, and by the employment of a large military force.

The terms are new and vague. The language of the Treaty and Annex would lead to the inference that the Queen of England stood somewhat in the relation of the Khedive to the Sultan, not possessed of the property, but of the usufruct of the island, with certain exceptions, and with the obligation of a certain money payment. Direct powers of legislation do not seem to be given, and the whole tenure, whatever its nature may be, of the island is to cease if a third state, Russia, who is no party to the Treaty, restores certain places, now in her possession by right of conquest, to the Porte. But whatever may be the difficulties of construing this Convention, England has lost no time in cutting the knot, after her own practical fashion, so far as her own interests are

³ Sir George Hill, *A History of Cyprus* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1948), Vol. IV, p. 403.

concerned, by the issue of an Order in Council on September 14, 1878, which though reciting the Foreign Jurisdiction Act, seems to treat Cyprus like Malta, or any possession of the kind, and which contains no reference whatever to the authority of the Porte, except by repeating an Order in Council relating to consular jurisdiction in the dominions of the Porte."⁴

On September 14, 1878, an Order in Council established a legislative council and an executive council consisted of the High Commissioner and not less than four and not more than eight other members. These members were nominated by Her Majesty, or provisionally appointed subject to her pleasure by the High Commissioner, with the advice of the Council, might make laws and ordinances for the peace, order and good government of the island. The High Commissioner had power to suspend any Councillor, make emergency Ordinances to be valid for not more than six months, appoint judges, justices of the peace and other necessary officers. The Legislative Council composed of four English, an Italian, a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot.

This Constitution showed similarities to those granted to the Crown Colonies, in which the Crown has entire control of legislation, laws being made by the Governor with the concurrence of a Colonial nominated by the Crown.⁵ Not long after the establishment of the Legislative and Executive Council, on 6 December 1880, Cyprus was transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office.

It was pointed out that, as the island was not a part of the Queen's possessions, but was administered by Her Majesty under the treaty with the Sultan, it was impossible for the Queen to surrender any part of the powers and responsibilities of government. "This reconstructed Constitution has

⁴ Ibid., pp. 403-404.

⁵ Ibid., p. 417.