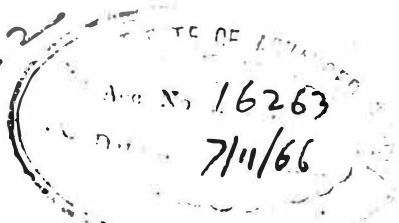


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THE CYPRIOT TURKS -

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RECENT events have bestowed upon the Turks of Cyprus a notoriety with which this peaceful community is not familiar. They have not given much trouble to the administration, they are not often mentioned in the British Press, and tourists and archaeologists who visit Cyprus usually take little interest in them. A minority constituting about a fifth of the total population, mostly engaged in agriculture and far from wealthy, they are less prominent than the Greeks in those occupations that attract the traveller's attention. There are, for example, hardly any Turkish hotels in Cyprus. None of the many travel books that have been written about the island has much information about them. Only one official publication gives a detailed account of their communal affairs, the *Interim Report of the Committee on Turkish Affairs*, 1949. To supplement this the student must resort to files of local newspapers, sometimes very tendentious, and accessible only in the Secretariat at Nicosia. It is not surprising that the Cypriot Turks are often dismissed as a moribund remnant of the defunct Ottoman Empire.

The Turks who live, or used to live, in the islands of the Mediterranean may be divided into two categories, of which the communities of Crete, now dispersed, and of Cyprus are good examples. The Cretan "Turks" were not ethnically Turkish, or even Anatolian at all. They were Cretans whose ancestors had accepted Islam at some time after the Turkish conquest of the island in the middle of the seventeenth century.* Conversion altered their legal status, but they did not thereby abandon their language, their dress, their customs or even intermarriage with families that had remained Christian. In Cyprus, on the contrary, the overwhelming majority of the Turks are the descendants of immigrants who came from Asia Minor, chiefly from the southern provinces, in the half century or so that followed the Ottoman conquest (1570-71). Many at least of the newcomers were settled upon land that had belonged to the Latin nobility, the Venetian state, the Roman Church, or the military or monastic orders. The names of some Turkish villages indicate this. The hamlet of Temroz (Greek *Temblos*) near Kyrenia, once belonged to the Templars, and after their suppression to the Knights of Rhodes, whose name is also preserved at Arodez (G. *Arodhes*). Ankolem (G. *Angolemi*) is thought to commemorate a feudal lord from Angoulême. Mora was once a hospice of the Knights of Rhodes. Alamyio (G. *Alaminos*) and Piskobu (G. *Episkopi*) both belonged to the great Ibelin family, the Crusader Counts of Jaffa. In many, though not all, these Turkish villages the people still know from

* The fact that something like half the population of Crete was converted to Islam at this time proves the superficiality of some common generalizations about the decline of Ottoman institutions and of Turkish Islam after the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent.



which part of Anatolia their ancestors came. Several families living in and around Köfünye (G. *Kophinou*) in the Larnaca district originally came from Antalya. The inhabitants of the large village of Galatya in the Carpass peninsula say that their forebears emigrated from Konya. Many similar instances could be cited.

In certain ways, therefore, ties are even closer between the Cypriot Turks and Turkey than between the Cypriot Greeks and Greece. No large migration from Greece to Cyprus is known to have occurred since ancient times. The Cypriot dialect of Greek is distinctive. In manners and temperament most visitors find the Cypriot less vivacious and more devout than the Greek from the mainland.* His Church is, of course, in communion with the Church of Greece, as with all other Orthodox Churches, but it is autocephalous and its Archbishop takes formal precedence of any Archbishop from the Kingdom. Though many Cypriot peasants no doubt envy the Church its broad acres there is little anticlericalism except among the Communists, in marked contrast to the situation in Greece. When, on the other hand, a Cypriot Turk crosses less than fifty miles of sea that separate him from Turkey he finds few changes, apart from those connected with a different administration, that are of any significance. Nor is his dialect provincial in the same way as Cypriot Greek. It is purer than many dialects spoken in the Republic.

By the Cyprus Convention of 1878 Britain conditionally assumed responsibility for the administration of Cyprus, which nevertheless continued to be a part of the Ottoman Empire, *de jure*. The Greeks welcomed the change, which they regarded as the first step towards incorporation in the Kingdom. Nor were the Turks resentful. Their own religious institutions were safeguarded by special clauses, and they perhaps felt that they were safer under the ægis of the most powerful empire in the world than they would have been under their own Sultan, who was compelled every few years to cede fresh territory to his enemies. Commerce was already, and largely continued to be, a Greek monopoly, infringed somewhat later by the arrival of a small number of energetic Armenians. The Turks were mostly officials or farmers. In the first years of British rule they continued to hold a high proportion of government posts, but their situation deteriorated after Turkey joined the Central Powers in 1914. The island was then formally annexed to the British Crown. There was hardly any evidence of anti-British activity among the Cypriot Turks during the war, which was not popular in Turkey itself, but the position of the community was now far less secure. It was well known that many English statesmen, notably Gladstone, had been favourably disposed to Enosis. Their difficulty had always been that Cyprus had not been theirs to give away. Britain could not, without the most flagrant breach of faith, relinquish to Greece the territory of her ally the Sultan, which had been entrusted to her to ensure the integrity of Ottoman territory elsewhere in the face of Russian aggression. After 1914 the ally became an enemy and Cyprus became Britain's own to give.

* One friend of mine, well acquainted with both Greece and Cyprus, once said that the only Cypriots who reminded him of the Greeks of Greece were the Turks of certain villages in the Paphos district.

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the Treaty of Sèvres the position of the more conservative among Cypriot Turks became desperate. They had not only ceased to be, even theoretically, the subjects of the Sultan and Caliph. There was soon no Sultan or Caliph to whom they could be subject, for the Turkish Nationalists abolished them. Alarmed by the increasing number of Greek officials in the local administration, and by the possibility that the island would be ceded to Greece, some of them identified themselves with the British as much as they could. Naturally, the authorities tended to rely upon such anglicized Turks in communal affairs. Among younger men, however, there was increasing sympathy with the Turkish Revolution, and a certain number of them migrated to the Republic. For his part Atatürk welcomed them, for they were accustomed to European methods and standards of administration, had no traditional loyalty to the Ottoman dynasty, and were, as most Cypriot Turks are, entirely without religious bigotry. The Turkish Government offered them educational opportunities and the prospect of responsible posts in the public service. It is not likely that more than about 8,000 left Cyprus, but those who did included men of education, enterprise and social standing, coming from families which were accustomed to undertake important duties in the community.

This migration affected the Cypriot Turks in two ways. Some of those who left sold their estates before leaving, and valuable property passed into Greek ownership at this time. Moreover, the community has suffered from losing the services of able men who would by now have attained to influential positions. On the other hand, their presence in Turkey has helped to intensify the interest taken by the Turkish Government and people in the future of Cyprus, to which, for obvious geographical and strategic reasons, they could not be indifferent even though there were not a single Turk in the island.

Atatürk's reforms were gradually introduced among the Cyprus Turks without encountering serious opposition. Though, it is hardly necessary to say, there was no official compulsion, or even encouragement, the veil for women and the fez have almost disappeared. Experience of European, secular administration and the liberalism characteristic of Cypriot Islam were responsible for the fact that the innovations caused less trouble than they did in some parts of the Republic. There was at the same time a growing feeling that the small group of anglicized Ottomans did not represent the community, and that the British relied too much upon their advice and gave them too much power. After the riots of 1931, when Government House in Nicosia was burnt, the Legislative Council was dissolved and the Constitution suspended. The rioters were, of course, Greeks, and the Turks have never been able to understand why they, who were loyal to the Government and whom nobody accused of complicity in the disorders, should have been treated in the same way as the Greeks. Following on Britain's encouragement of Greek military action in Ionia, which Turks have resented more than the war of 1914-18, this failure to discriminate between the guilty and the innocent community has led many Turks to feel that all British governments are irrationally philhellene. To this cause is often ascribed any reluctance on the part of the authorities to use force

against the lawlessness of the Enosis party. The attitude of the British was, of course, that language, race and religion were without legal significance and that both Turks and Greeks must be treated merely as Cypriots.

The dichotomy in the social structure of Cyprus which the events of 1931 so clearly revealed is a survival of the old Ottoman *millet* system. Under that system the Orthodox Christian, the Armenian Christian and the Jew had each been subject in matters of personal law, such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, to the jurisdiction of his own ecclesiastical courts, which could call upon the Ottoman authorities to enforce their decisions. In this way each religious community became something of an *imperium in imperio*. It is easy to understand how the Archbishop of Cyprus became very powerful, more powerful at times than the Turkish Governor whose relations with the Orthodox population were largely conducted through the hierarchy. On occasion an Archbishop might be deposed, or even executed, as was Kyprianos in 1821, and the system was gradually modified in the nineteenth century, as the Empire came to be increasingly centralized. Nevertheless, the advent of the British meant a certain loss of power for the Church. No Archbishop could hope to challenge a British High Commissioner as successfully as he had sometimes defied a Turkish Pasha. Nor was the new policy towards the *millets* always popular. Resentment was caused when the British refused to use the police to enforce the collection of ecclesiastical taxes from the Orthodox population as the Turks had been doing.*

The solidarity of the Muslim *millet* has survived three-quarters of a century of foreign rule. All Cypriot Muslims feel themselves to be Turks, whether they are descended from immigrants from Anatolia, as most of them are, or from Cypriots converted to Islam, as some of them must be, or from Muslim Arabs who came from other Ottoman provinces, as a very few of them are. There are Muslim villages where the people speak Greek rather than Turkish, but these villagers are as enthusiastically Turkish in their sentiments as those who know no Greek at all. The Orthodox community is somewhat less homogeneous. For one thing there is a greater disparity of wealth among the Greeks than among the Turks. There is also a large Greek Communist party, or, it would be more accurate to say, a large party which accepts the leadership of a small Communist group. Though both the Church and the Communists want Enosis, and though some Greek Communists are practising Christians,† it has become obvious that close co-operation with the Communists would cost the Archbishop the support of the Government of Greece.

The communal question in Cyprus thus resembles that which existed in

* Details of this curious dispute will be found in Sir George Hill's *History of Cyprus*, vol. IV, pp. 573-5. Similarly, in 1949 a Turkish Committee recommended that the colonial government should levy a tax on the Muslim population to meet the cost of repairing mosques and paying salaries to their imams. The suggestion was ignored. In both instances the British authorities have doubtless considered that religious obligations are a matter for private conscience.

† Mr. Osbert Lancaster tells a story of a Greek Communist, "guilty without question of at least half a dozen singularly brutal murders", who excused himself from a party meeting in order to make his Easter communion. *Classical Landscape with Figures*, p. 32.

the undivided Indian Empire. It is not surprising that partition has been discussed as a possible solution, notably by the Turkish journalist, Ahmet Emin Yalman. The Communists call for a united front of Greek and Turkish workers, but Communism has virtually no influence among the Turks; in Cyprus as in the Republic, most of them regard it as a thin disguise for the old enemy, Russian imperialism. The Greeks have tried to placate Turkish opposition to Enosis by offering to guarantee the position of the Muslim minority. For the same reason that the Muslims of India were unwilling to put themselves at the mercy of a permanent Hindu majority in a self-governing India, the Cypriot Turks are very suspicious of British plans for constitutional development. When a minority feels itself threatened by a majority, as the Turks certainly do in Cyprus, it is of little use to offer them proportional representation in an elected assembly. They would always be outvoted in such a body, and it would not console them that they could always vote in exact proportion to their percentage of the total population. For, unlike a political party that finds itself in a minority, they could have no hope of persuading some of their opponents' supporters to vote for them at the next election. Under a parliamentary system nothing short of equal representation with the Greeks would give the Turks a feeling of real security. The Greeks, in a majority of four to one, are obviously not likely to make such a concession. Nor would reserve powers vested in a British Governor satisfy the Turks completely, for they distrust the philhellenism of British officials. It has even been claimed that Enosis might be preferable to autonomy without this safeguard. In the former contingency Turkey could make representations in Athens regarding the treatment of the Muslim minority in Cyprus. She could hardly compel the Colonial Office in London to put pressure on the officials of a self-governing colony, with which she would herself have no direct relations.

Plural societies such as that of Cyprus have existed in the Middle East since ancient times. Islam inherited from the Hellenistic world the rudiments of the *millet* system, herself accorded a subordinate but definite status to the adherents of other scriptural religions, and was able to govern these societies with remarkable success. They had little difficulty in adapting themselves to the earlier, paternal phase of British colonial rule. It remains to be seen whether they can survive under the unitary parliamentary democracies which Britain is now trying to establish throughout her empire.

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