

### **1.1. Ottoman rule**

For the three centuries that followed the conquest of the Medieval Kingdom of Cyprus by the Ottoman Turks in 1571, the island developed with a new structure in administration, new systems of taxation, exploitation of land and resources and of economy in general, and new orientations in trade. At the same time Cyprus formed part of a wider entity, together with other countries, which included ethnic groups of diverse cultures, languages, religions and traditions, all of them assembled under the umbrella of the same political power. The main centre which nourished the peripheries in many ways, and was also the focus of fashion in dress, was the capital of the Empire, Istanbul (Constantinople). It was during this period that the people of Cyprus came into closer contact with Oriental dress and other aspects of Ottoman culture.

The conquest of the island by the Ottoman Turks also marked the genesis of the Turkish Cypriot community, which has remained a permanent element in the population of Cyprus ever since. The first nucleus of Ottoman Muslims was formed by part of the military troops, 2,666 *sipahis* (cavalrymen) and 1,000 janissaries, who stayed in the island after the completion of the conquest. With a view to remedying the depletion of population and revitalizing the economy, between the years 1571 and 1577 the Sultan issued several firmans ordering emigration to Cyprus from a number of provinces of Anatolia. Most of the immigrants were farmers, but craftsmen of different professions were also included; several of them practiced crafts related to the production of clothing, such as weavers and spinners of goat hair, tailors, shoemakers and bootmakers, felt-makers, wool-carders, dyers and silk-manufacturers, tanners and silversmiths or goldsmiths. Neither the number nor the ethnic synthesis of the immigrants is known, and it is probable that they were not exclusively Muslims.

In 1738, Richard Pococke noticed that the island was not well peopled 'eighty thousand souls being the most that are computed in it', and also mentioned that two thirds of the inhabitants were Christians. On the other hand, according to Archimandrite Kyprianos, in 1777 of the total population of the island, which numbered 84,000, 37,000 were Christians and 47,000 Muslims. The increase of the Muslim population has been considered a consequence of the conversion of many Christians to Islam. According to the Russian Consul, I. Atsali, in 1785 the total population of Cyprus reached 120,000.

Ottomans congregated mainly in the urban centres, where they built their mosques, *medrese* (religious schools), khans (inns), hammams and other public buildings. In Nicosia, Latin churches were turned into mosques, and two minarets were added to the Gothic cathedral.

Cyprus did not develop an industrial economy during this period and most of the population was chiefly engaged in farming. Since the source of income of the State depended upon the prosperity of the country itself, i.e. on the tax-paying subject (the *reaya*) settling and tilling the land, much emphasis was given to land exploitation. All agricultural land in the villages passed under the State's proprietorship as *miri* (public) land. *Miri* land was given by order of the Sultan to high-ranking officials only to cultivate and administer in return for services rendered to the State. The peasants who cultivated public land were given temporary deeds which entitled them the permanent usufruct of the land, in return for a specified amount of income.

Churches and monasteries were soon redeemed by the Orthodox Church and in the centuries following the conquest an impressive rise is observed in ecclesiastic and monastic holdings. An accumulation of land and other possessions can also be seen in the case of high officials, such as the Dragoman (Interpreter of the Serai), a Christian official who was appointed by a firman of the Sultan and acted as a liaison between the Turkish administrative authorities and the Christian subjects. The Dragoman and the powerful Church were the two main supports of the Greek community and played an important role in local affairs. The Orthodox Church was generally restored to its ancient privileges. Its ethnarchic role had been recognized by the Sublime Porte at an early stage and the power of the Archbishop and the bishops increased, especially from the middle of the 18th century. The Archbishop was acknowledged as the official representative and guardian of the Orthodox Greeks.

The Armenians possessed the former Benedictine convent of Our Lady of Tortosa near the Paphos Gate in Nicosia. The church, dedicated to Virgin Mary, was given to the Armenians by a firman in 1570 and remained the main church throughout the period of Ottoman rule. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were 200 Armenians in Nicosia. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cloisters of the Armenian Church were bought by the Melikian family.

At the same time, the situation of the general population of Cyprus was miserable. Although the feudal system and serfdom had been abolished and the Cypriot peasantry were given the right to cultivate their own land, subjects were oppressed by the imposition of numerous taxes

and maladministration. People resorted to uprisings at moments of despair, especially whenever excessive taxation burdened both ethnic groups. The situation was aggravated by natural catastrophes, such as drought, locust attacks, earthquakes, epidemics and famine.

Political disorder continued in the beginning of the 19th century: in 1804, unbearable taxation and shortage of foodstuffs, especially grain, caused a serious uprising of the Muslim inhabitants in Nicosia, followed by the peasants, against the Archbishop and the powerful Dragoman Hadjigeorgakis Kornessios. The rioting of 1804 is considered as the prelude to 1821, the year of the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence: though Cyprus was not directly involved, this revolution had serious repercussions in the island. The outcry against oppression culminated in the three uprisings of the year 1833, which marked the end of the armed revolts during this period.

However, Cyprus under the Ottomans was known as an important centre for commerce, which traded with the major ports of the Mediterranean and exported a portion of its main products: cotton, silk, wool, wheat, barley, wine, olive oil, carobs, madder roots etc., along with goods manufactured by local craftsmen.

During the period of Ottoman rule, Larnaca-Scala was the principal commercial port, which from the 17th century onwards became the seat of the consulates of the European states. The consuls were mainly heads of privileged corporations of foreign merchants. As merchants and money-lenders, the foreign diplomats were involved in the economic affairs of the island, even those of the Church, and were to some extent integrated into the local society. They even attempted to gain access to agricultural production, and control the local supply of cotton and silk, both important raw materials for the European textile manufacture.

By the mid-18th century, many diplomats and merchants from the Ionian Islands settled in Cyprus, married Cypriot women and contributed to the formation of a local bourgeoisie. The consular families and the wealthy merchants introduced the European way of life and their presence gave a cosmopolitan air to the small town of Larnaca.

In contrast to Larnaca, Nicosia, the indisputable capital of the island, was marked by the strong presence of the Ottomans; throughout the period of Ottoman rule its population comprised about two thirds Muslims and one third Christians. Nicosia was the administrative and religious

centre, the seat of the Archbishop and members of the high clergy, of the Dragoman of the Serai, as well as of the Turkish Governor with all his court, the *mullah*, a high ranking religious representative, the pashas and the aghas, officers of high military ranks, and most Turkish officials in general.

The Ottoman military class of Cyprus became involved in the local economy, developed activities in trade and property transactions, acquired wealth and political power. They formed a military elite which was integrated in the local society.

In the town quarters the Christian and Muslim inhabitants congregated around their religious centres, churches or mosques respectively, although in the course of time mixed neighbourhoods were also formed. The Armenians, who in 1572 comprised 8% of the Christian population of Nicosia, occupied a separate quarter near the Paphos Gate. In the bazaars there was no separation of nationalities: here Turks, Greeks and Armenians had their workshops side by side, according to their specialty.

The population presented a differentiated social stratification. Merchants and artisans formed the middle stratum of the social hierarchy, which can be schematically visualized in the shape of a pyramid; the broad base was occupied by the peasantry, which comprised the overwhelming majority of the population, and the poor working class in the town centres. On the top of the social pyramid, the Ottoman ruling class prevailed, a military, political and cultural elite, the standard of which only a limited number of very rich Christians could approach. This scheme is clearly traceable in late 18th to early 19th century documents.

The Dragoman of Cyprus as well as high-ranking members of the clergy, a few notables and wealthy merchants formed the upper class in the local society. In the urban centres there had developed a network of prosperous individuals, money-lenders, landowners, merchants, all persons who exploited different resources and profited from a variety of investments. Some wealthy landowners were also found in small towns and villages. At a time of poverty and misery, the way of life of these people reflected foreign influences, mainly oriental, in developing the highest possible standard of living. The elite of the Cypriot society was not homogeneous. Among the outstanding merchants figured Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Europeans. About 62% of the trade was in the hands of foreign merchants. The well-to-do sought to differentiate themselves from the ordinary people by adopting a distinctive lifestyle

characterized by luxury and glamour. This lifestyle was expressed in all aspects of material life, mainly in impressive private houses, their luxurious interior arrangement, in imported high quality furnishings and decoration, in their exquisite dietary habits; last but not least, the high economic and social status is reflected in the appearance of the elite, their dress, jewellery and personal items. Dress is a key indicator of the lifestyle of the elite and, together with houses and furnishings, a visible marker of social status.

All this came to the end with the tragic events of 1821. In anticipation of an insurrection movement, ruthless measures were adopted by the Governor of Cyprus Küçük Mehmet. The leading Christians were proscribed and persecuted; the Archbishop and three bishops, abbots and archpriests, the chief men, dignitaries and rich merchants of Nicosia and other towns or villages became the victims of the massacres in July 1821. In the following ten years 20,000-25,000 Cypriots left the island. The establishment of the independent Kingdom of Greece in 1833, which was the outcome of the War of Independence, strengthened the bonds between the Greeks of Cyprus and the national centre of Hellenism in mainland Greece.

At about the same time (1826-1839), Sultan Mahmud II initiated an ambitious programme of reforms in the Ottoman Empire. Reforms covered all aspects of life and extended also to dress, imposing the adoption of European attire, first of all the fez as a substitute for the turban.

Following the death of Mahmud II in 1839, substantial reforms, known as Tanzimat, were officially prescribed by the Sublime Porte throughout the Ottoman Empire. The Noble Rescript of the Rose Bower (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif*) promulgated on 3 November 1839, by which Sultan Abdul Mecid I (1839-1861) introduced a series of reforms, was followed by the Imperial Rescript (*Hatt-ı Hümayun*) of 1856, which was issued under the pressure of the European powers after the end of the Crimean War (1853-1856). With it the equality of civil rights for all the citizens of the Empire was reaffirmed.

The administration of Cyprus became less harsh during the last phase of Ottoman rule. The progress stimulated by the Tanzimat reforms was slow. Nevertheless, under a now more equitable system of government, the population rose from 100,000 in 1840 to about 200,000 in 1862, of which about two-thirds were Christian and one-third Muslim. Moreover, due to the close relations between Cyprus and Greece, especially after the establishment of the independent Kingdom of Greece, numerous Greek nationals settled in Cyprus, and a Greek vice-

consulate was established in 1846. In 1854 a Commercial Tribunal was set up in Larnaca, and in 1864 Cyprus acquired its first bank, the Imperial Ottoman Bank.

The last phase of Ottoman rule was also a period of promotion of education. In an atmosphere of revival of Cypriot Hellenism, Greek education, which was originally in the hands of the Church, was now enhanced with the foundation of new schools. As far as the Muslims of the island are concerned, the first school of a new type, called *Rüşdiyye*, which was created in the Ottoman Empire within the framework of the reforms, was established in Nicosia in 1862/63. Before that, there were only religious schools, called *medrese*, which were dependent on pious foundations endowed by wealthy people.

Despite these progressive steps, the general picture of Cyprus drawn from the British Consular Reports during the last four decades of Ottoman rule (1842-1878), is that of an undeveloped rural country with primitive agricultural practices, very deficient means of transport, unimportant local industries, lack of infrastructure in general. Progress was gradual but tangible, especially in the urban centres, and could be traced also in the appearance of the people, first of all of the wealthy upper classes. A trend towards Europeanization was already apparent before Cyprus was ceded to Britain in 1878.

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