

CHAPTER 2

**Cyprus under the Byzantine
Empire, 324-1191**

V a s i l i k i N e r a n t z i - V a r m a z i

Aims

This unit aims to examine the various political and social changes in Cyprus from the 4th to the end of the 12th centuries.

After studying this unit, students will be in a position to

- Understand the continuity of the events in a such a long period
- Understand the particularities of the history of Cyprus during the Byzantine period

Keywords

- Administration
- Arab raids
- Treaty of 686
- Annexation
- Cypriot Church
- Rebel movements
- Crusades
- Isaacius Komnenus

Introduction

Cyprus played an important role in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean during the middle Ages. It was an almost compulsory station for the pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land and a place of conflicting interests between the Byzantines and the Arabs from the middle of the 7th to the middle of the 10th century. Later it was used by the crusaders as a base for every kind of supplies and it finally became a commercial center for the Italian naval cities, especially Venice and Genoa.

For all these reasons Cyprus is present to many medieval sources of all kinds--historical and literary works, ecclesiastical and hagiological texts, law documents, archives etc., written in Greek, Latin, Arabic and occasionally in a new language of Latin origin. Among all, the Greek sources are most reliable and best dated and they form the ground on which all other information can be based. That is valid especially for the period from the 4th to the 12th century. For the following centuries (13th-15th) the Byzantine sources are supplementary to the Latin, Italian, French and the authentic Cypriot sources.

First Byzantine Period (324-648)

Cyprus in the 4th and 5th century

According to the provincial administrative system of the Roman Empire, introduced by Diocletian (284-305) and completed by Constantine the Great (324-337), Cyprus was a province (*provincia*) of the *diocesis* of the East, whose capital was Antioch by the river Orontes in Syria. That *diocesis* was part of the big *praefecture* of the East (*praefectura praetorio per Orientem*), the largest administrative periphery of the whole Empire.

In the conflict between Licinius and Constantine the Great (323-324) Cypriots stood by Licinius, to whose jurisdiction Cyprus belonged. However, following Licinius's defeat, Constantine remained the sole ruler of the Empire and Cyprus became part of his large State.

Isolated in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea at that time, Cyprus was often victim of incursions by the pirates. For that reason Constantine took care and deployed as new governor of the island an ambitious general named Kalokairos, who only some years later (in 333) revolted against the emperor and proclaimed himself independent ruler of Cyprus. His attempt was unsuccessful and Kalokairos was captured and punished to death by fire. His punishment was executed in Cilician Tarsos. Nevertheless, Kalokairos inaugurated in Cyprus a line of revolutionary movements run by local ambitious Byzantine governors, who took the chance to revolt against the central government of the Empire--they took advantage of the distance that separated them from the capital, Constantinople, and also of the readiness of the inhabitants of the island to become independent.

Kalokairos is also known through a Cypriot folk tradition that connects him with the "cats of the monastery of St. Nicholas" in the south coast of the island. According to this tradition, in the beginning of the 4th century, Cyprus passed a long period of drought, fact which led to the land remain uncultivated, and thus, get replete with snakes. As soon as this period was over, Kalokairos brought to Cyprus a great number of cats in order for them to combat with (weird) the snakes. The monks of the monastery of St. Nicholas undertook the responsibility to feed these cats.

In 332 and in 342 earthquakes hit Cyprus and many cities were destroyed, among which was also the capital Salamis. This city was rebuilt during the reign of Constantius (337-361), son and successor of Constantine the Great, in whose honor the city was renamed Constantia. The same emperor exempted from taxes for a period of four years the surviving inhabitants of Salamis, in order to give them the opportunity to recover from the earthquake of 342.

During the middle of the 4th century, governor of Cyprus was Kyrinos, whom the contemporary orator Livanios praises both as a good archon and a sophist.

Many other physical catastrophes hit Cyprus by the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century. The worst of them occurred in the last years of the 4th century, when a big famine stroke the island and the inhabitants were saved only thanks to the help of saint Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis. Some years later, an Isaurian invasion from the south coast of Asia Minor caused further troubles to the Cypriots.

Cyprus was also used as a place of exile. Emperor Arkadios (395-408) exiled to Cyprus Eutropios, a highly ranked court officer (he was *praepositus sacri cubiculi*), as soon as the latter fell in disgrace. Eutropios is more known through his controversy with Ioannes Chrysostomos, the patriarch of Constantinople at that time.

The Cypriot Church

The history of the Christian church of Cyprus during the first Byzantine centuries is of special interest. Christianity was spread in Cyprus early on by Apostle Barnabas, pupil of Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, the appearance of a large number of heresies caused problems to the population, fact which called for the need of a Great Father of the Church that would root out the various heresies and ensure the predominance of orthodoxy in Cyprus. The most important of these ecclesiastical Fathers were Spyridon of Trimithous (who took part in the First Ecumenical Council of Nikaia in 325 and was one of the essential adversaries of Arius and his heresy Arianism) and Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, an inspired theologian and writer.



Fresco from the church of Panaghia Asinou (1106 AD)

Around the same period, many saints of the Eastern Christian church lived in Cyprus or worked there for a long time, like Saint Therapon, Saint Ilarion, Saint Trifyllios and others. All these contributed to the final victory of Christianity over paganism and the heresies.

Excavations pertinent to buildings that were constructed after the earthquake of 342 show that paganism had almost disappeared from Cyprus by the end of the 4th century and that the problems caused by the various heresies were over as soon as Epiphanius of Salamis asked from the emperor Theodosios to expel from Cyprus all the heretics--Savelians, Simonians, Nicolaites and many others--something which he attained. From that time onwards the Church of Cyprus was devoted to its Christian purpose.

In the early 4th century, the Patriarchate of Antioch required to include the Church of Cyprus in the area of its jurisdiction. The leadership of the Cypriot Church reacted and showed its resolution to stand away from Antioch. Its representatives strongly supported their rights and independence against the Patriarch of Antioch during the 3rd Ecumenical Synod at Ephesus in 431. At the same time, Constantinople wanted to weaken the other Patriarchates, and especially the Patriarchate of Antioch, and for that reason encouraged the trends for independence. Before the end of the 5th century, when Emperor in Constantinople was Zeno, namely between 485 and 489, a miracle came

to help solve the religious problems. Beneath a locust tree (*kerataia*) near Salamis, were found the relics of St. Barnabas having on his chest a copy of the Matthew Gospel written in his own hand. This event reinforced the Cypriot position and promoted the independence and autonomy of the Church of Cyprus. As a result, from the time of emperor Zeno (476-491), the Cypriot Church was an autocephalous archbishopric. The archbishop was elected by the fourteen bishops holding the seats of the largest cities of the island and his election was certified by the emperor himself and not by the patriarch or the Holy Synod of Constantinople. His position was very high in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; the Archbishop of Cyprus was mentioned immediately after the five patriarchs.

Administrative changes in the 6th and the 7th century

Administrative changes occurred in the political situation in Cyprus just before the mid-6th century. According to the administrative manual, known as Synekdemosis of Hierokles, in the year 535 Cyprus remained a separate province under a “consularius” and included the following cities: Constantia (the capital), Tamassos, Kitis, Amathus, Korin (Kourion), Paphos, Arsinoe, Soloi, Lapithos, Kythroi, Karpasin, Trimithous, Lefkousia. A novel (new Law, novella) of Justinian I, issued in the same year, notifies the annual financial obligations of the ruler of Cyprus to the central government of the state amounting to 76 golden coins, an amount of money quite high for that period.

A few years later the situation changed dramatically. Justinian (527-565) tried to militarize the administration in some remote areas of his state, thereby reforming the provincial administrative system of Constantine the Great based on the complete separation of the political from the military power. Part of these efforts was the strange civilian / military administration created in 537, the “quaestura iustiniana exercitus”, which included Cyprus together with the northern peripheries of the state and the Aegean islands. This administration was apparently created in order to strengthen the financially weakened--due to barbarian invasions--districts of the Danube with the income of the richest areas of Cyprus and of the other islands, which were experiencing at the time a period of relative calm and prosperity. In any case, this administration does not appear to have been maintained for a long time and must have been abolished immediately after Justinian’s death (565).

We do not possess specific information regarding the administrative system in Cyprus for the period between the mid-6th and the mid-7th century. But we know that during the Byzantine-Persian war, at the time of Heraklius’ reign (610-641) and especially in the second decade of the 7th century, Christian refugees from Palestine and Egypt had fled to the island seeking peace and security. Among these was the patriarch of Alexandria John the Merciful (610-619), who was a Cypriot. In the 7th century, the militarization of the government in several provinces of the Empire was continued with the division of the State into “themata” (= large political and military regions) and the appointment of a governor as a general (“strategos”) having gradually begun--the governor gathered in himself the political and military power. Cyprus was not included in that division, because in the meantime, the Arab invasions had started, which by the mid-7th century had created a new situation on the island.

Economic life

Although information is scarce, it seems that the main factor of economic life in Cyprus during the early Byzantine period (Late Antiquity) was the cultivation of land, and therefore, both the residents and the state based their major income and higher tax revenues on agrarian economy. Of course there was trade, although it was not always strongly developed. The maritime communication of the island with the opposite shores of Asia Minor and Palestine and with the capital, Constantinople, was frequent. This is the picture offered in the numerous Lives of saints relating to early Byzantine Cyprus and in the archaeological findings of the period. Moreover, the southwest coast of Cyprus was a trade station for the transport of grain from Egypt to Constantinople, since the plains of Egypt supplied Constantinople --like ancient Rome--with grain until the time of the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs (640-642 AD).

It is clear from the sources that many disasters hit Cyprus in the early Byzantine period, including droughts, earthquakes, famines, and piracy, as well as population movements, but all these did not substantially affect the vitality of the island, since the inhabitants managed to recover from each natural disaster and attack.

Period of Arab raids

The first Arab raids

The Arabs adopted Islam in 622 AD and soon after they extended their rule outside the Arabic peninsula. They prevailed in Syria after the battle in the river Yarmuk in 636, conquered Jerusalem in 638, and became masters of Egypt in 641-642. Thus, they arrived on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, where they began to build ships by exploiting the maritime knowledge of the local residents. Aiming at dominating the Mediterranean, Cyprus was one of their primary navigational goals.

The exact date of the first invasion of Arabs in Cyprus is dubious. In the 10th century, the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus mentions in his work "De thematibus" an Arab invasion in Cyprus as having occurred in the reign of Heraklios (610-641) and Caliph Abu Bakhr (632-634). This testimony is obviously wrong, because when Abu Bakhr was Caliph, between 632 and 634, the Arabs had not completed the conquest of Syria and had not yet reached the Mediterranean coast.

According to Theophanes the Confessor, who wrote his Chronography in the early years of the 9th century, the first Arab invasion in Cyprus had occurred in 648/9.

Leader of the Arabs was Moavia, who was not at that time caliph (he became caliph only in 661), but commander of an area in Syria. The Arabs campaigned against Cyprus with a large fleet of 1700 ships. They destroyed the capital Salamis and pillaged the country, but when they heard that a large Byzantine fleet was coming against them, they left the island and went back to the Syrian coast.

This information by Theophanes is supported by the testimony of Arab sources and of a fragmentary inscription found in an excavation in Cyprus (1974).

The attacks of the Arabs on Cyprus continued during the next years, but none of them ended up in a complete conquest of the island.

The first Arab attacks on Cyprus are also present in the Lives of Cypriot Saints, describing the unsuccessful efforts of the Arab invaders to abuse relics of saints. In the same texts are mentioned the transferrings of relics out of Cyprus (especially in Constantinople) under the threat of the Muslims.

The treaty of 686 and its consequences

An important landmark in the history of Cyprus is the treaty of 686 between the Byzantines and Arabs. This treaty was a renewal of the treaty that was first signed in 678 after the defeat of the Arabs in the siege of Constantinople (673-678). According to that treaty, the Arabs were obliged to pay to the Byzantine emperor 365,000 golden coins, 365 horses, and 365 slaves per year. In the renewal of

the treaty in 686 a new term was added, namely the sharing of taxes between the Byzantines and the Arabs that live border regions: Cyprus, Armenia and Iberia (Caucasus).

This latter term caused a lot of trouble to the Cypriots. The equal distribution of taxes was making Cyprus neutral and vulnerable both to the Arabs and the Byzantines.

The emperor Justinian II (685-695 and 705-711), the last member of the Heraklios' dynasty, inaugurated a period of upheaval on Cyprus and its inhabitants. In 691 Justinian II got furious with the Arab caliph Avimelech, who paid the tax of 365,000 coins not in Byzantine golden coins but in newly cut Arab golden coins. As a result, Justinian II called off the peace with the Arabs and wanting to punish them by depriving them from the taxes of Cyprus forced the Cypriots to abandon their island and immigrate to Asia Minor. Most of the Cypriots who were obliged to immigrate settled in the northwest of Asia Minor, in the region of Kyzikos, near the Hellespont. Among them were bishops of the cities of Cyprus and the archbishop John. The emperor Justinian II gave to the archbishop large jurisdiction, even more than that of the bishop of Kyzikos. The ecumenical Council of 691/692 certified the privileges of the archbishop John in his new region, where a new town was built named Ioustinianoupolis in honor of the emperor Justinian II.

The Cypriots remained in Ioustinianoupolis and the surrounding area for seven years (until 698), when one of the successors of Justinian II, the emperor Tiberios III (698-705) repatriated them to Cyprus. This emperor had previously served as a commander (*droungarios*) of the *theme of Kibyraiotes* in southwest Asia Minor and was fully aware of the situation in the eastern Mediterranean sea. Certainly he believed that the repatriation of Cypriots on their island could help the defense of the eastern Mediterranean against the Arabs who at that time were spreading rapidly in North Africa and the Mediterranean.

Before the final repatriation of the Cypriots, negotiations had taken place between the Byzantines and the Arabs. The latter were forced to allow the return home of the Cypriots who were probably prisoners in Syria and Palestine. Only after the Arabs fulfilled this obligation did the Byzantine emperor help the Cypriots who lived near Hellespont and in other Asia Minor regions to return to Cyprus.

To these events is related another information given by the Byzantine writer Anastasios of Sinai, who wrote during the second half of the 7th century. His testimony has to do with the presence of Cypriot prisoners near the Dead Sea. Anastasios Sinaitis insists that the Cypriots were the only prisoners capable of withstanding the harsh climatic conditions of the Dead Sea, because the climate there was similar to the climate of their homeland Cyprus.

Writing in the 10th century, the emperor Constantine Porfyrogennetus testifies that Cyprus had remained uninhabited for seven years in the last decade of the 7th century. This of course is an exaggeration. Nevertheless we have to believe that the population of the island in this period had been reduced to the minimum, because Cypriots were living in many parts of Asia Minor and also in Syria and Palestine.

Cyprus between Byzantines and Arabs in 8th and 9th century

Since the first decades of the 8th century the relations between the Byzantines and the Arabs experienced a new phase. The rise of the Isaurian dynasty to the Byzantine throne in 717 and the failure of the Arabs to conquer Constantinople after its second siege in 717-718, encouraged the Byzantines to take aggressive actions against Muslims during the next years. In 740 the Arabs were defeated in the battle of Akroinon (Frygia) and after that they were obliged to evacuate the largest part of Asia Minor. Since then the struggle between Byzantium and the Caliphate was confined in border conflicts.

The fights around Cyprus belong within the framework of these border conflicts. They depended essentially upon the action of the Byzantine and Arab fleets in the eastern Mediterranean.

The interest of Arabs in the eastern Mediterranean remained strong until the mid-8th century. That is as long as the dynasty of Omaiads lasted and the capital of the caliphate was Damascus. After 750 and especially after the transfer of the capital of the caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad the interest in the Mediterranean Sea came in second place.

In the first half of the 8th century, however, Arabs made their presence in Cyprus felt. We know that in 718, after the inglorious end of the second siege of Constantinople by the Arabs, the winds caused their ships--that were leaving Bosphorus and Marmara--to scatter and several of them to arrive at Cyprus.

According to another testimony, that of Theophanes' Chronography, in 742 Arabs had tried another transfer of Cypriot population to Syria. The exact number of this population is unknown neither is it known whether they stayed in Syria for a short time or permanently.

In 746 the Byzantine fleet moored in Cyprus and a little later came to the same place a large Saracen fleet. The conflict was inevitable and in the sea battle that followed the Byzantine navy defeated the Arabs--the Greek fire burnt most of their ships and allowed for the capturing of the rest, so that from the thousand Arab ships it was only three that escaped. The simultaneous presence of Byzantines and Arabs in Cypriot coasts probably indicates that we are still in a period of condominium of the two powers on the island. However, there are testimonies that manifest that, during the first period of the iconoclast crisis, iconoclasm never spread in Cyprus and many believers of the icons were exiled to the island or fled there. Especially in the years of the reign of the Emperor Constantine V (741-775), Cyprus was used as a place for exile of the monks who insisted in venerating icons and they denied leaving the monastic life.

All these pieces of information suggest that during this period the Byzantines had a kind of control of the island. About the same time Christian refugees from Syria and Palestine resorted to Cyprus or used Cyprus as a first stopping point in their wondering into Byzantine territory. To all those, the emperor Michael I Rangabe (811-813) and the patriarch Nikephoros gave financial aid and took care of them in other ways.

New raids of the Arabs against Cyprus took place when Caliph was Harun al Rashid (786-809), one of the most important sovereigns of the Abbasid Dynasty. At that period the Byzantine Empire had serious internal problems and was unable to keep a firm stance against its enemies. Especially in 790, a sea battle took place between the Byzantines and the Saracens near the Cypriot coast. The Byzantines were defeated and the general Theophilos was captured and taken in front of Harun al Rashid. He was punished with a martyr's death because he denied changing faith and becoming a Muslim.

Some years later Harun al Rashid leading a numerous army carried out a major campaign in Asia Minor, captured some border Byzantine castles and destroyed them, while another part of his army proceeded until Ankara. The Emperor Nikephoros I (802-811) was unable to fight him decisively and after negotiations a treaty was signed. According to the treaty, the Byzantine Emperor was obliged to pay to the Caliph 30,000 golden coins every year. Another term of the treaty forbade the Byzantines to rebuild the castles that the Arabs had captured during their last campaign in Asia Minor. Emperor Nikephoros I did not obey to this term and soon later rebuilt the destroyed castles. Then Harun al Rashid revenged by ordering a new raid in Cyprus. In 806 the Arab navy arrived in Cyprus and the soldiers who debarked from the ships captured towns, destroyed churches and transferred many of the inhabitants to Syria.

Once again the installation of Arabs in Cyprus was not permanent, since we know that during the next years contacts between Cyprus and Byzantium were often. An "Archon of Cyprus" is referred to in a catalog of Byzantine officials in the middle of the 9th century (Taktikon Uspenskij of 842/43). A little later in 878 a letter of the Patriarch Photios was sent to Stavrakios "archon" (Eparchon) of Cyprus.

During the reign of Basil I (867-886), the founder of the Macedonian Dynasty, Cyprus is referred to as a "theme" (military and administrative unity) for seven years. The information is given by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his work "De tematibus". We do not know for the exact years that this took place but we do know that a general named Alexios Armenios served as a "strategos" of Cyprus. Immediately after these seven years the Arabs interfered again and the island paid taxes to them as in the previous centuries. However, it is clear that for a short period between 867-886 Cyprus was intergraded totally in the Byzantine provincial administrative system.

From the *Life* of Saint Constantine the Jew, who lived for a few years in Cyprus in the second half of the 9th century, we learn that the saint was obliged to interrupt his peregrination because of an invasion of Saracens who taxed the island together with the Byzantines for centuries. This is one more testimony for the fact that the condominium in Cyprus lasted yet in this period.

The crisis of the 10th century

During the first years of the 10th century Cyprus had close relations with the capital of the Byzantine Empire. In 901-2 the relics of St. Lazaros were moved from Cyprus (namely the Kition) and were placed in the church which had just been built in Constantinople by Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886-912). About the same period, in a Byzantine textbook teaching the tactics of war, Cyprus is marked as a strategically important site for the Byzantine naval forces. The generals had to gather their ships in Cyprus and from there to attack enemy ships were coming from Syria, Palestine and Egypt. It is therefore obvious that in a case of crisis Cyprus was used as a center of the Byzantine war fleet.

A little later the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennitos (944-959) in his work “De ceremoniis” notes the obligation of the ruler of Cyprus to send spies in the Gulf of Tarsos and in Tripoli and the Syrian Laodicea, who would gather information on the movements of the Saracens.



Fresco in Lampadistis Monastery, Kalopanagiotis

All these testimonies show a kind of cooperation between Constantinople and Cyprus. Nevertheless in the same time the Arabs also had a basis in Cyprus. In the autumn of 904 the Saracen ships carrying prisoners that the pirates had captured two months earlier in Thessaloniki stopped for supply in the area of Paphos. The testimony is given by John Kaminiates, a priest from Thessaloniki, who was one of the prisoners.

The fall of Thessaloniki, the second city of the Empire, to the Arabs was not an isolated event. Following the third decade of the 9th century, since the Arabs had captured Crete, the Aegean islands and the coasts of Greece and Asia Minor suffered a lot from the pirates' raids. After the fall of Thessaloniki the Byzantine government decided to take drastic measures against the pirates. In head of a large fleet, general Imerios toured around the Aegean Sea and then went on to the eastern Mediterranean and stopped in Cyprus. There he treated violently the Arabs who lived on the island. After his departure, for retaliation, the leader of the Arab fleet Damianos, an ex Christian who had become Muslim, arrived in Cyprus and caused a lot of disasters. He burned the fields, ruined cities and took many prisoners. Among the prisoners was the bishop of the small town Chytri, Demetrianos, who was very old but voluntarily followed his congregation to Baghdad, capital of the Arab State at this period (911-912). Nikolaos Mystikos, patriarch of Constantinople, assumed the role of mediator and with a long letter to the Caliph of Baghdad managed to persuade him to liberate saint Dimitrianos and the Cypriot prisoners and allow their return home.

All these events are known from two main sources, the *vita* of saint Dimitrianos and the Letter of the patriarch Nicolaos Mystikos to the Caliph of the Arabs. Both sources insist that Cypriots still paid tax on the Arabs and the Byzantines, according to the old treaties, and only the bad behavior of the two leaders of the Arab and the Byzantine fleet were responsible for the tragedy. Luckily at the end all the prisoners returned home within two or three years and another adventure of the Cypriots ended relatively soon thanks to Saint Demetrianos and the patriarch Nikolaos.

The annexation of Cyprus to the Byzantine Sovereignty

In the following years, owing to internal problems, the Arabs stopped the invasions to Byzantine territories. Byzantium on the contrary passed to a period of counterattacks and won many victories. French scholar Gustav Schlumberger has characterized this period as “épopée byzantine”. Among the greatest successes of these years was a) the recapture of Crete in 961 and b) the removal of any Arab threat from Cyprus and the annexation of the island to the Byzantine Empire in 965, when emperor of the Romans was Nikephoros II Phokas (963-969). The Byzantine sources consider the fact a natural consequence of Byzantine expansion eastwards. They simply say that in the second year of the reign of Nikephoros Phokas in Constantinople, the general Niketas Chalkoutzis annexed Cyprus to the Byzantine Empire, finally expelling the Arabs from the island. It is known from another source, the *vita* of saint Athanasios, the founder of the monastery of Lavra in Athos, that when the saint visited Cyprus in about 960, the island was in no trouble with the Arabs and he could travel easily around.

Summary – Conclusions

A long period of suffering for the Cypriots had come to an end. Since the first Arab invasion in Cyprus in 648/9 and until 965, year of the final annexation to the Byzantine Sovereign, there have been around twenty Saracen invasions in the island. Most of this time Cyprus was in a kind of condominium, so that the two powers (the Empire and the Caliphate) shared the taxes of its inhabitants. Cypriots themselves at times preferred this option and tried to complete their tax obligations, in order to avoid new invasions and upheavals.

It is easy to come to the conclusion that the relation of Cyprus with the Arabs was clearly economic and sometimes turned hostile, when the Arabs expanded their raids to Cyprus in order to revenge the Byzantines or to seize prey.

It is more difficult to specify what exactly the relation of Cyprus with Byzantium was during these three centuries. The Orthodox Christian and Greek speaking population of the island had spiritual and emotional ties with Constantinople. On the other hand the government of Constantinople collected taxes from the residents of the island according to the old treaties while at the same time it expected the help of the Orthodox Cypriots in its fights against the Muslims. During this long period Cyprus was a complete section of the Byzantine Empire only for seven years, when Emperor was Basil I (867-886) and “strategos of the theme” of Cyprus was Alexios Armenios.

The terms “archon” or “eparchon” used by the Greek sources during these centuries for the person responsible of the government on Cyprus have a very wide meaning in the Byzantine hierarchy of officials. Probably, therefore, the relation of the Cypriots to Constantinople was a relaxed one and at times the rulers of Cyprus were primarily interested in their island rather than in the Empire.

The evidence, however, we obtain from contemporary sources have many holes, thereby raising a

lot of questions not easily answered. It is certain, however, that the Arab invasions of three centuries (648-965), although they did not make Cyprus a section of the Arab world, they did cause tremendous damage, reduced the population and destroyed many important monuments on the island. The large and prosperous coastal cities were devastated and its residents spread to smaller settlements in the interior of the island. Commercial activities were limited to a minimum and occasional farming was virtually the only source of living for the inhabitants of the island, while rural economy was the base of tax revenues for sovereignties in Cyprus. A most commercial hub, like Cyprus, between Europe, Asia and Africa, was transformed for three centuries into a purely agricultural area.

Late Byzantine Period

Administration and rebel movements in Cyprus until the time of the 1st Crusade

Since 965 Cyprus was ruled by Byzantine governors and officials were sent to the island from Constantinople. In a catalog of Byzantine officials (Escorial) dated between 971-975 the “strategos” of Cyprus is mentioned among the other generals of naval territories. That means that Cyprus was already a “theme”, that is to say, a military and administrative unity of the Byzantine Empire.



The ancient church of St. Euphemianos in Lysi

However, the distance from the center and the isolation of the island favored the abuses and facilitated the rebellions of Byzantine officials. Since 1040, general of Cyprus was Theofilos Erotikos, known by his previous military activity in the North of the Balkans. In 1042 he took advantage of some problems in the central government in Constantinople and he rebelled and proclaimed himself independent governor of Cyprus. To get the people of Cyprus (the nation of Cypriots) in his part, he blamed “the judge and agent of public taxes”, the protospatharios Theophylaktos as responsible

for the serious tax obligations imposed on the residents of the island. However, the rebellion of Theophilos had not successful results for himself and his associates. The new Byzantine government of Constantine Monomachos, who meanwhile had stabilized his position in Constantinople, sent the Byzantine fleet against Theophilos Erotikos. The leader of the navy, Constantine Chage, easily restored order in Cyprus and captured Theophilos Erotikos as prisoner. The rebel was driven to Constantinople, where he became a subject of derision in the Hippodrome.

Most dangerous was the rebellion of another Byzantine strategos in Cyprus fifty years later, in 1092. Initiator of this new rebellion was the Governor of Cyprus at that time, whose family name was Rapsomates. He was well prepared and coordinated his actions with those of another rebel, the general Karykes in Crete. The emperor Alexios Komnenos I (1081-1118), despite the many problems he had to face at that time, managed to dispatch army and navy under the leadership of Ioannes Doukas, who suppressed the rebellion, first in Crete and then in Cyprus. Rapsomate, after a series of strategic errors, failed to raise effective resistance to the imperial troops and was eventually captured prisoner.

It is characteristic that Rapsomatis had his headquarters in Nicosia (Lefkousia, according to the history of Anna Komnena, who narrates all these events in much detail) and not in Salamis, the ancient capital of the island. The landing of the imperial troops occurred initially in Kyrene, which they occupied, but the real conflict was in the central plain. Rapsomates attempted to retreat south to

Limassol (Nemeso by Anna Komnena), but he did not succeed. It is therefore obvious that the focus at this time fell within the island and Nicosia was the seat of the government. The ports of Cyprus and the old capital Salamis (or Constantia) had not recovered yet after the Arab invasions neither had they reached the boom that they would have later in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries.

Immediately after the defeat of Rapsomates the emperor Alexios Komnenos sent capable officials, to restore order and ensure the administration of the island. Eumathios Philokales is the best known of the governors of Cyprus in the coming years. As Duke of Cyprus he strengthened the defense of the island with new fortresses and extended Byzantine influence to the opposite coast of Syria and Asia Minor. At the same time, Alexios Komnenos, in an effort to limit the power of the governor on the island, attempted to separate military from political power and appointed as “krites and exisotes” of Cyprus, (namely political officer with responsibilities in justice and taxation) Kalliparios, a man not descending from an illustrious Byzantine family, but very well known for his integrity, justice and modesty. We are in the period that the institution of the “themes” is abandoned, the governors of the provinces are called “doukas” (duke) and not “strategos” (general) and the political officials of every province become independent from the local military officer, thereby depending directly on the central government in Constantinople.

The island’s economy in the 11th century was still predominantly rural and farmers were groaning under heavy taxation imposed by the Byzantine government. This was necessitated by the increased costs for the defense of the island and the whole Empire.

Katakalon Kekaumenos, a Byzantine writer of the second half of the 11th century, gives an impressive testimony for the tax obligations of the inhabitants of the islands belonging to the Byzantine Empire. He writes that the war ships that protected the islands gathered from the inhabitants every kind of food (wheat, wine, oil, beans, meat, cheese etc.) and a lot of money. That happened not only with effect to the small islands, but also to Crete and Cyprus.

It is well known that during the 11th century the Byzantine Empire was in a big crisis and the situation did not improve in the course of time. Especially in the Middle East external factors contributed to aggravate the situation.

Cyprus at the time of the 1st Crusade

As a result of the First Crusade in the last years of the 11th century, the political scene in the eastern Mediterranean changed dramatically. The 1st Crusade started from Central Europe in 1096 and concluded with the capture of Jerusalem three years later (July 1099). In Palestine the crusaders founded the Kingdom of Jerusalem and around it smaller principalities under a feudal system. The presence of these states in the East coast of the Mediterranean Sea brought Cyprus in the center of attention of all the surrounding people, while in the same time Cypriots undertook more obligations. For more than a century Cyprus was the main channel of communication between Byzantium and the Frankish States of Palestine and Syria.

Already before the end of the 1st crusade Cyprus was connected with the crusaders. During the siege of Antioch (Syria) in 1098 the crusaders faced major problems of supply and lack of food. The orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem Symeon, who lived at that time self-exiled in Cyprus, was concerned to gather from Cyprus wine and various kinds of food and to send all these to the camp of the Christian army outside the walls of Antioch. Given the fact that the testimony comes from a Western source, it renders it indisputable.

In February 1098 the Byzantine general Tatikios, who, leading a small number of soldiers, had accompanied the crusaders all the way through Asia Minor, left the camp of the besiegers outside Antioch and proceeded to the Syrian coast, where he met the Byzantine navy. Together with the "Roman ships," he and his soldiers sailed to Cyprus. There were many reasons for the departure of Tatikios and his army from the camp of the Christians: first the hunger that prevailed in the camp, secondly his disappointment about the potential capture of Antioch, and mainly the hostility of Bohemund, the leader of the Normans from South Italy, who planned to keep Antioch as his own principality.

The crusaders continued their fight without help from the Byzantine army. They captured Antioch in June 1098 and Jerusalem in July 1099. In their way from Antioch to Jerusalem they stopped to Latakia (Laodikeia, at the North coast of Syria), which they surrendered to the Byzantine general Andronikos Tzintziloukes, while the governor of Cyprus Eumathios Philokales received two smaller fortresses in the same area. All these happened after the intervention of the emperor Alexios Komnenos, who continued to have good relations with some of the leaders of the crusaders and especially with Raymond de Saint Gilles from Toulouse (whom the historian Anna Komnena calls Issageles).

New problems were caused by a small fleet from Pisa that accompanied bishop Daimbertus, who a little later was elected catholic patriarch of Jerusalem. The ships from Pisa made pirate raids to the coasts, trying to land on Cyprus. The Duke of Cyprus Eumathios Philokales was obliged to attack them and forced them to sail to the Syrian coast.

A little later the Byzantine generals of the fleet, Tatikios and Landoulfos, arrived in Cyprus and together with the governor of the island decided to open negotiations with Bohemund, prince of Antioch. Negotiations were unsuccessful and after some time Latakia surrendered to the Normans of Antioch, because it did not receive help from Cyprus.

Then the emperor Alexios Komnenos decided to fortify Kourikon and Selefkia in the South of Asia Minor. Bohemund did not succeed to capture the two castles and Cyprus was effectively protected from the North.

At about the same time the governor of Cyprus facilitated the return of two of the leaders of the crusaders to West Europe. Robert of Flanders and Robert of Normandy had finished their pilgrimage to the Holy Land and returned home via Cyprus and Constantinople.

The governors of Cyprus maintained friendly relations with Raymond de Saint Giles during the following years. In 1102 Raymond besieged Tripolis and prepared his principality around this city. To strengthen his position he asked for help from Cyprus in order to build a new fortress on the hills

near Tripolis. Eumathios Philokales, who was still “Duke of Cyprus”, responded to his demand and sent to Raymond building materials and workers from the island. The castle was completed in 1104 and Raymond named it Mont Pèlerin (Castle of the Pilgrim), but Muslims called it Qalat Sanjil from the name of its founder. So, one of the most famous castles of the Middle East was built by Cypriots.

In 1103/4 Byzantine soldiers were transported from Cilicia to Cyprus, because there was need for more army on the island. Duke of Cyprus at that time was Constantine Euphorbenos.

The jurisdiction of the Duke of Cyprus was not only military, but was mainly diplomatic. When in 1105 the death of Raymond de Saint Giles became known, the emperor assigned the Duke of Cyprus with the task to maintain friendship with the rulers of Tripolis. A small delegation carrying great amounts of money set off from Cyprus to meet William, nephew and successor of Raymond, in order to persuade him to take an oath of loyalty to the Byzantine emperor.



Church at the monastery of Panaghia Apsinthiotissa

The same effort was repeated a few years later, when Bertrand took the place of William in the principality of Tripolis. Then Alexios Komnenos sent to Cyprus a high official from Constantinople to receive from the Duke of the island ships and money and go to Tripolis, where he had to remind Bertrand of the friendship and loyalty of his father Raymond to the Byzantine emperor. At the same time the ambassador had to convince Bertrand to support together with the king of Jerusalem and his counts the war of the Byzantine army against Tankred, prince of Antioch. According to the historian Anna

Comnena, the fundraising was necessary, because the Latins were particularly eager for money. For that reason the Duke of Cyprus had to raise all the money he could from his area (1111-1112).

All these years plenty of food and goods for every day use were sent from Cyprus to Tripolis, so that the Byzantine emperor could threaten the residents of the city that they would die of hunger in case all these benefits from Cyprus stopped.

It is obvious that Cypriots struggled under heavy taxation all these years and many of them, in order to meet all the requirements of the ambitious foreign policy, found themselves in the extreme point of poverty. A text written by a highly ranked clergyman, Nikolaos Mouzalon, gives a harsh picture of the situation at Cyprus in that period. Nikolaos Mouzalon served as archbishop of Cyprus for three years from 1107 to 1110. In a long poem of 1,057 verses he sets forth the miserable conditions on the island. These were due to the bad administration of the imperial officials and the greed of the tax collectors, who deprived the farmers from everything they had. The poem is written in an archaic, sophisticated language, but it is easy to follow the dramatic way in which the life in Cyprus is described. The island is beautiful and the land productive, but the residents are even unhappier than the mythical Tantalus. They cultivate the land and have no food, they work in the vineyards and have not wine and every kind of wealth is foreign to them. Even the clergy has been corrupted and moral order is reversed. Elder bishops are left resourceless, while young deacons behave as great lords. Priests are forced to pay

heavy taxes, while the descendants of the Jews exploit pious Christians. Collectors of the public taxes make brutal raptures and abuses without being punished for their actions. Especially the peasants are very poor and they have no food to eat, house to sleep and clothes to wear. Even the churches are left without arable land, deprived of their sacred relics and unprotected.

Under these conditions Nikolaos Mouzalon could not remain archbishop of the Cypriot Church for a long period. He resigned from his sea after three years, because, as he says, he could not give any help to the people of his congregation.

Cyprus between East and West

Since the last years of the 11th century and especially in the 12th century new enemies (Turks and Normans) and the neglect of the Byzantine navy obliged the Byzantine emperors to ask for help from the naval cities of Italy, first from Venice in 1081, and later from Pisa (1111) and Genoa (1155). In return for their help the Byzantine State offered to the naval cities commercial privileges and tax exemptions in the ports of the Empire. The granting of privileges generally damaged the Byzantine State and especially Cyprus, which the Westerners began to exploit economically while intervening also in other issues of the island.

Besides, the new Frankish States in Palestine and Syria caused substantial changes in the international trade movements and the transportation of products from East to West. The activities of the Franks transferred the commercial roads to the southern Mediterranean and created new trading conditions, leaving Constantinople and the other large cities of the Empire (Thessaloniki, Trebizond etc.) outside the orbit of international trade.

Clear evidence for the expansion of Venetian privileges in Cyprus and in Crete provides an edict (chrysoboullon) of Manuel Komnenos dated to 1147. The chrysoboullon survives only in Latin and validates privileges, which the father of Manuel, John II Komnenos, had already granted to Venice. According to the edict, Venetian traders could trade in Cyprus and Crete having the same privileges as in the other ports of the Empire.

However, it is certain that the presence of the Italian dealers in Cyprus had not only negative consequences. The strong commercial activity that was developed mainly by the Venetians helped the development of the Cypriot ports. Gradually, the urban population of the island found new areas of employment, significantly ones in which the State had already granted tax exemptions and could not impose new taxation. Being so dependent on Italian money, Cypriots turned to urban occupations, found new jobs and some of them managed to prosper.

The Byzantine government continued to have great interest in Cyprus throughout the 12th century. This interest became more obvious in 1142, when emperor John II Komnenos considered giving Cyprus and Cilicia to his younger son Manuel as his own territory. Finally this thought was not realized and Manuel succeeded his father to the throne after the death of his elder brother.

In the second half of the 12th century Cyprus received significant blows by Western adventurers, who having their base in the Frankish States of Syria and Palestine, attempted incursions and pirate raids to Cypriot territories. In 1156 Renal, (Renauld de Chatillon) prince of Antioch at that time, gathered ships and with the help of the Armenians from South Asia Minor attacked Cyprus in order to grab prey. The governor of the island, John Komnenos, nephew of the emperor Manuel, rushed to the shore and initially repelled the invaders. But when he returned to the capital Nicosia, the invaders came back and they managed to proceed in the interior of the island. In the battle that followed John Komnenos was defeated and captured along with many of his officers and soldiers. The winners, Franks and Armenians, remained on the island for three weeks grabbing and looting. They destroyed small towns and villages and they captured prisoners asking large sums of money to release them. When finally the invaders left, the country was devastated and the Cypriots were left poor. An earthquake that stroke Cyprus the next year (1157) deteriorated even more the situation of the residents.



Panaghia Asinou

It is worth noting that the emperor Manuel Komnenos punished and humiliated the prince of Antioch, when in Easter of 1159 he made his solemn entry in Antioch and forced Renal to accept the suzerainty of the Byzantine Emperor.

Five years after the invasion of Renal in Cyprus, another Frank prince attempted incursions to the Cypriot shores. He was Raynald III of Tripolis. Wanting to revenge the emperor Manuel for his decision to choose as his wife Mary of Antioch and not the sister of the count of Tripolis, Melissanthi, he plundered the coasts of Cyprus and caused a great deal of disaster. Duke of Cyprus at that period was Alexios Doukovlastos, a man of noble origin and good manners. The Byzantine writer Constantine Manasses, who gives all the relevant information in a long poem called “Odoiporikon” (travelogue, itinerary), praises the beauty of the island and the productivity of the earth, but he is moderate when he refers to the people of Cyprus.

In these years Egypt was a rising Muslim power. For that reason in 1169 the Byzantines and the Franks of Palestine attempted to conclude an alliance against Egypt that was threatening both. Under the leadership of Andronikos Kontostephanos the Byzantine navy sailed to Cyprus and succeeded to push away six Egyptian ships. Then the admiral of the Byzantine fleet began negotiations with king Amalarich of Jerusalem. The negotiations ultimately failed and the Byzantine fleet returned to its base.

The Church of Cyprus in the last Byzantine centuries

The position of the Cypriot Church is emphasized in the Late Byzantine period. The sources of the time point out the “autokephalon” and the possibilities of auto-government of the Church in Cyprus according to the ancient rules. In the middle of the 12th century the ecclesiastical author Neilos Doxopatres notes in his work “*Order of the patriarchal thrones*” that in his days the Church of Cyprus

was an autocephalous Archbishopric as in the old days. The fourteen bishops of Cyprus elected their archbishop and the emperor himself confirmed his election in Constantinople.

During this period the Archbishopric of Cyprus is related to the Archbishopric of Achriss (Ochrid) in the central Balkans, which was founded in 1018 by the emperor Basil II (976-1025) after the defeat of the Bulgarians and the annexation of Tsar Samuel's state in the Byzantine Empire. During the next few years, the Archbishopric of Achriss was identified with "Iustiniana Prima" that was founded in the same area by the emperor Justinian I in the 6th century. This Archbishopric, as a place of origin of the emperor, enjoyed many privileges. This was the "*1st Justiniana*". After that the Church of Cyprus was characterized "*2nd Justiniana*" or "*New Justiniana*". Probably the Church of Cyprus owes this characterization to Justinian II (685-695 and 705-711), who had developed particular relations with the Cypriots during the years of the Arab raids. Nevertheless there is also the view that the Archbishopric of Cyprus took the name 2nd Justiniana in honor of Empress Theodora, wife of Justinian I, who was of Cypriot origin from her father's side. This opinion is less probable, because the term 2nd or New Justiniana appears from the 13th century onwards, while the term 1st Justiniana is in use from the 6th century and is certified by a novel (law) of Justinian I.

Many worthy prelates occupied the archiepiscopal throne of Cyprus in the 11th and 12th century. The scholar Nicolaos Mouzalon, who served in Cyprus from 1007 to 1010 and became later patriarch of Constantinople, is already mentioned in a previous chapter. Another significant clergyman was John II Kretikos. As archbishop of Cyprus he participated in two councils taking place in Constantinople in 1157 and 1170. He supported the doctrines of the Orthodox Church and signing the proceedings of the Councils he defended the unique position of the Cypriot Church.

In the 11th and 12th centuries major monasteries were established in Cyprus, of which the most famous are the Monasteries of Kykkos and Machairas. All monasteries, endowed with estates and supported by tax exemptions, played an important role as pillars of Orthodoxy during the Frankish and Venetian rule in the island (1191-1571) and were significant cultural centers in the years of the Ottoman occupation from 1571 afterwards.

The rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos and its consequences

During the reign of Andronikos I Komnenos (1183-1185), there was a new rebellion in Cyprus. A relative of the emperor, Isaakios Komnenos, using false documents, managed to expel the legitimate governor of the island, take the power, and become independent ruler of Cyprus (1184). Emperor Andronikos was not indifferent for the event, but because of the distance that separated Cyprus from Constantinople he delayed to send army against the rebel.

In the next year (1185), once Andronikos lost his throne, his successor Isaakios II Aggelos sent an army against Isaakios Komnenos in Cyprus, because he continued to be independent and denied to pay taxes in Constantinople. The imperial army was completely defeated by Isaakios Komnenos in

1186. The ruler of Cyprus was helped by the navy of the Normans from South Italy and in that way Isaakios had strengthened his forces. Many soldiers of the imperial army were killed whereas others were taken as captives.

After his victory, Isaakios Komnenos became a real tyrant. He usurped the title of “basileus”, imposed heavy taxes, seized properties, and killed potential opponents. Under these circumstances a number of the residents of the island were obliged to leave their country.

The contemporary sources are very austere against Isaakios Komnenos. Both the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates and the Cypriot monk Neophytos Egkleistos (the Recluse) describe the situation in Cyprus under the command of Isaakios Komnenos as very miserable.

Then new events in the East created new circumstances, which determined the fate of Cyprus. In 1187 the Sultan of Egypt Saladin defeated the Knights of Palestine in the battle of Tiverias, occupied Jerusalem, and reduced the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem to a few coastal cities. Immediately afterwards a new crusade was organized in Western Europe. In this 3rd Crusade (1189-1192) participated the three major sovereigns of Europe, that is, the emperor of Germany, the king of France and the king of England. The king of England, Richard the Lionheart, decided to follow the sea route to the Holy Land.

During the voyage bad weather forced Richard and his army to stop on the south coast of Cyprus (Limassol). From there he started negotiations for supplies with the ruler of Cyprus Isaakios Komnenos. The negotiations proved unsuccessful and resulted in complete hostility. In a decisive battle near Trimithous the English knights defeated Isaakios’ army. Isaakios himself was captured and taken as a prisoner in Syria. After his victory Richard took one after the other the castles of Cyprus, and became master of the whole island.

That was the end of Byzantine sovereignty in Cyprus. It is worth noting that not only the foreign traders based in Cyprus but also the Cypriots themselves did not react initially to the conquest by Richard. They were content to escape a tyrant like Isaakios.

Summary

The Late Byzantine Period in Cyprus covers a period of about 225 years and is marked by repeated rebellions of governors of the island. Only the last one of the rebellions, this of Isaakios Komnenos, succeeded to cut off Cyprus from the rest of the Empire for seven years, thereby opening the road to foreign conquerors.

Since the last years of the 11th century Cyprus had close relations with the Frankish States founded by the crusaders of the 1st Crusade in Syria and Palestine. As a center of negotiations between East and West, Cyprus had many obligations and its residents were pressed by heavy taxation. About the same period, the granting of trade privileges to the maritime cities of Italy helped the development of the Cypriot ports and the resulting commercial activities benefited a part of the Cypriot population.

Throughout this period, becomes apparent the importance of the autocephalous Church of Cyprus as well as its high position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the East.

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