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Colonial forestry and environmental history: British policies in Cyprus, 1878-1960



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Abstract

The forests of the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus, famous for their extent in antiquity, were described as severely damaged by misuse over the preceding centuries at the time of the British arrival on the island in 1878. The British colonial authorities sought to remedy this "degradation", and their success in doing so before their departure in 1960 has seldom been questioned. This dissertation examines this accepted history of the colonial period by utilizing archival, ethnographic, and physical data and focusing upon the British impact on the landscape as well as the relationship between the British authorities and the Cypriot people. This reappraisal suggests several points. The British approached the Cypriot forests with certain misunderstandings and misconceptions in 1878. They believed that the majority of the forested areas on the island were unregulated commons, which they were not. They further misread the landscape by assuming that its appearance, quite different from that of a humid and temperate biome, indicated degradation. Within these concerns of degradation, they misinterpreted the Cypriot rural economy by holding that shepherds and agriculturalists did not and could not mix. These misunderstandings of Mediterranean ecology, combined with prevailing ideas for good forest management and agricultural intensification, and hampered by inadequate budgets, resulted in policies that did not initially "return" the forests to any imagined state of past verdure, and may instead have been harmful in certain aspects. Yet the British officials did not behave according to traditional stereotypes of colonial rulers either. The actions of many of the colonial foresters were not solely driven by a desire for instant profit; instead the majority consistently attempted to maintain and ameliorate the forests both for indirect ecosystem benefits (which they recognized would be remunerative to the island as a whole, even if not immediately to the department) and direct benefits of timber production. The meticulous records in the archives display a concern with doing what was best for the forests and for the people, which inevitably led to conflicts as to what was "fair" for the forest and "fair" for the inhabitants, however defined.

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Cyprus as a British colony. June 4, 1878 the island came under British rule, in exchange for the support provided by Turkey to the Russian-Turkish war. The British administration initially acted very cautiously, because the convention allowed only temporary occupation of the island. In 1888 the British developed the constitution to Cyprus on a classic colonial model. In accordance with the "constitution" in 1882, limited self-government of both communities was set in Cyprus. The activities of the British brought some results in the economic sphere. Parliamentary elections in July 1960 brought victory to his supporters who formed the Patriotic Front. Vice-president of the island was Turkish Cypriot F. Kucuk. Colonial forestry and environmental history: British policies in Cyprus, 1878-1960. Ph.D. Dissertation, Austin: Graduate School of the University of Texas. URL (last checked 16 April 2012). <http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/3244/harris>. Analysis of forest fires causes and their motivations in north Algeria: The Delphi technique. *Forest-Biogeosciences and Forestry* (accepted). [59]. NWCG (2005). *Alastos', DorosCyprus in History* (London, 1955) and *Cyprus Guerrilla* (London, 1960) give a fair account from the Greek Cypriot point of view ("Alastos" is the distinguished Cypriot historian, Evdoros Joannides). 6 See Rosenau, James N., "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy," in Farrell, R. Barry, ed., *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics* (Evanston, Ill., 1966), especially p. 41. Rosenau in practice uses the term pre-theory to describe an advanced stage of typology construction, the meaning I am adopting here.