Landbound Island: The Mediterranean and Cyprus in the Ottoman Age of Revolutions
[Χερσαίο Νησί: Η Μεσόγειος και η Κύπρος στην Οθωμανική Εποχή των Επαναστάσεων]

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Antonis Hadjikyriacou's *Χερσαίο Νησί* is a profound and methodologically innovative contribution to Cypriot, Ottoman, and Mediterranean historiography, confronting two of the most persistent and distorting tendencies in the writing of Cypriot history: insularity and teleology. The first sees Cyprus as an isolated and self-contained space, whose history unfolds largely independent of the broader Mediterranean and Ottoman worlds in which it was embedded. The second tendency imposes the backward shadow of the 20th century, particularly its nationalist conflicts and partitions, onto earlier centuries, producing a historical narrative that sees the island's past as merely a prelude to its modern ethno-political divisions. Hadjikyriacou resists both, offering instead a complex and nuanced account of Cyprus during the long 18th century, which was a crucial period of transformation and reconfiguration.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Mediterranean studies, environmental history, and digital humanities, and grounded in unpublished Ottoman archival material, the book reframes Cyprus, not as an outlier but as a revealing microcosm of larger imperial and Mediterranean dynamics. In doing so, it deals with long-standing questions, while posing new ones about the relationship between geography and power, ecology and economy, community and conflict.

The book is structured into four thematic chapters, *Mediterranean*, *People and Environment*, *Communities*, and *Space*, each one building upon the last while also standing on its own as a distinct analytical lens. This structure allows Hadjikyriacou to trace long-term changes, engage with historiographical debates, and introduce new evidence and interpretations.

The opening chapter (*Mediterranean*) lays out the theoretical and historiographical framework of the book. It begins with an engagement with the classic approaches to

Mediterranean History, notably the one by Fernand Braudel, whose *longue durée* framework remains foundational. However, Hadjikyriacou also pays particular attention to the work of Faruk Tabak, whose *The Waning of the Mediterranean* offers a more dynamic approach to the region. Tabak's focus on ecological and economic transformations provides a conceptual backdrop for Hadjikyriacou's own investigation of Cyprus.

The second chapter (*People and Environment*) marks a significant departure from traditional historiography by integrating Geographic Information Systems (GIS) into historical analysis. Hadjikyriacou uses this technology in order to trace spatial patterns over time and reveal structures that would otherwise remain invisible. The core of the chapter is a comparative analysis of three sources: the Ottoman censuses of 1572 and 1832/33, and the Kitchener map of 1882, created shortly after the beginning of British rule. These sources, spanning over three centuries, allow for a remarkably detailed reconstruction of demographic distribution, land use, tax burdens, and economic activity. The island emerges as a landscape in constant flux, shaped by climate, social conditions, and human choices. In the 16th century, the demographic centre of gravity was concentrated in the western and mountainous regions, driven by political unrest, epidemics, piracy, and the heavy rainfall of the 'Little Ice Age'. By the 19th century, however, this centre had shifted to the eastern plains, due to the limitations of mountainous terrain for population growth and to the expansion of large landholdings and commodity crop cultivation, which required a substantial labour force. As the author argues, these patterns were not unique to Cyprus, but reflected broader Mediterranean trends of the same period.

The third chapter (*Communities*) turns to social and communal life in Cyprus during the Ottoman Age of Revolutions, a subject that has been extensively studied yet often distorted by modern Greek and Turkish historiography. Shaped by contemporary national priorities, these historiographies tend to portray the Ottoman period in Cyprus in starkly opposing ways, as an era of massacres and perpetual conflict, of brutal fiscal exploitation, or as a golden age of harmonious coexistence, depending on the author's perspective. Hadjikyriacou avoids these oversimplified extremes, recognising instead a broad spectrum of relationships that ranged from peaceful coexistence to violent conflict. As he aptly notes, 'they were not *only* peaceful or *only* conflictual. Not only were they both, but they were much more, encompassing a broad spectrum of contact and coexistence, marked by diverse forms and nuances' (p. 283).

He demonstrates that both inter- and intra-communal relations were shaped by a wide range of factors beyond ethnicity or religion, as economic class, gender, local hierarchies, and patterns of landholding and taxation all played significant roles. The

chapter pays close attention to social differentiation within communities, challenging the idea that Greek Orthodox Christians or Muslims formed monolithic blocs. Instead, Cypriot society emerges as a dense web of relations, often marked by cooperation, conflict, and negotiation across multiple axes.

The author interprets the religious and ideological tensions that intensified at the turn of the 19th century as symptoms of deeper economic and social shifts. At the heart of these tensions was the growing concentration of wealth and power in the hands of members of the island's Christian community, a development that many Muslims of the time viewed as a disruption of the established Ottoman order. A key example is the case of Dragoman Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios, whose accumulation of power in the late 18th century made him both a symbol of Christian advancement and a target of Muslim resentment. Hadjigeorgakis' trajectory, his control of tax farming, his links to Istanbul, and his unprecedented authority over Muslims, serves as a case study in the tensions that could arise when older social contracts were disrupted by new economic and administrative realities. Far from being a simple story of sectarian conflict, his fate reflects deeper structural contradictions within the Ottoman system as it adapted to internal and external pressures.

The final chapter (*Space*) examines the *respatialisation* of Cyprus during the Ottoman period, how shifts in the island's geopolitical significance influenced its historical trajectory. Hadjikyriacou argues that the island's strategic value fluctuated according to broader geopolitical conditions. After its conquest, Cyprus was elevated to the status of a *beylerbeylik*, an unusually high designation for an island, which included parts of Anatolia and Syria. This was not due to the island's intrinsic value, he argues, but to its location at a frontier of the empire, particularly during the unsettled decades following the conquest.

However, this status shifted after the Ottoman conquest of Crete in 1669. Crete's new role as a frontier zone demoted Cyprus in both strategic and administrative terms. From a once-central node, it became a marginal space, used as a place of exile and a backwater post for disgraced and incompetent officials. As Hadjikyriacou succinctly puts it, 'the Ottomans realised that the island was only valuable as long as it was in the hands of a competitor in the region, because it constituted a threat or external source of instability' (p. 296). In essence, the empire occupied Cyprus not out of a vision for its development but simply to ensure that no rival power could use it against them.

Yet the marginality of Cyprus was never permanent. The island regained importance in the late 18th century due to a convergence of internal revolt and external threat: the 1764 uprising, driven by resentment over taxation, and an unprecedented

geopolitical shift, the arrival of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean during the Orlov Revolt of 1770, brought Cyprus back into focus, positioning the island as a frontier region and elevating its significance within the empire's defensive and administrative priorities. Later events, such as a series of uprisings between 1804 and 1833, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, and the rise of Muhammad Ali, further reinforced the island's strategic relevance, prompting the Ottoman administration to strengthen its military governance. As Hadjikyriacou shows, these changing perceptions of space were not just matters of high politics. They had real consequences for local society: in administration, taxation, land tenure, and elite formation. In turbulent times, opportunities for wealth and power opened for certain figures, such as Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios, but these were also periods of volatility, as the state sought to reassert control through military presence and bureaucratic reform.

What ultimately makes *Χερσαίο Νησί* such a siginficant and relevant contribution is its ability to combine empirical depth with theoretical breadth. It is based on painstaking archival research, especially in underutilised Ottoman sources, yet it is never narrowly empirical. At every turn, Hadjikyriacou connects local dynamics to broader imperial and ecological processes, demonstrating how Cyprus was not only shaped by its environment but also played an active role in shaping it.

The book ends with a subtle and evocative anecdote about the *kourkouna* (marbled spinefoot), a fish species that migrated from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal. The spread of this fish in Cypriot cuisine, driven by Lessepsian migration and the resettlement of refugees from Karpasia and Famagusta after 1974, becomes a metaphor for the book's core argument: that history is lived in motion, through migration, adaptation, and entanglement. Cyprus' history, like its ecology, is shaped by shifting imperial, environmental, demographic, and cultural currents.

In sum, *Χερσαίο Νησί* presents Cyprus not merely as a geopolitical pawn or a stage for nationalist myth-making, but as a dynamic, evolving entity, an island of rivers and mountains, trees and vineyards, inhabited by real people with daily struggles, ambitions, and priorities. They cooperate and clash, not always along religious or ideological lines, but within a dynamic world shaped by shifting forces. Although technically insular, Hadjikyriacou's Cyprus does not exist in isolation; it is not a bounded, self-contained island, but a landbound node in a wider Mediterranean world, surrounded by armies and fleets, merchants and pirates, droughts and floods, earthquakes and epidemics, shaped by and responding to the world around it.

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