



The Development of Turkish Cypriot Secularism and Turkish Cypriot Religious Affairs

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The origins of today's Moslem population on the island

After the conquest of Cyprus in 1570-71, the Ottoman commander Lala Mustafa Pasha left a small garrison on the island. The official Ottoman sources refer to a total of 3,779 soldiers, many of whom, later, brought also their families.¹ Some of them even married the widows or daughters of the fallen Latin notables; an example is the last Lusignan Cornaro Lady of Potamia Castle who married the cavalry soldier Ibrahim Menteshoglou; their family has survived to the present day with the families of Menteshoglou and Bodamializade.

A census, taken shortly after the conquest, revealed a taxable population of some 85,000 Greeks, Armenians and Maronites, as well as 20,000 Turkish settlers, mostly campaign veterans, who were given land by Mustapha.² According to the Ottoman Register Book of 1572, 905 villages were inhabited and 76 villages were deserted.³ Thus the Ottomans did not build new villages and inhabited the empty ones, which mostly kept their old names while a few were given new Turkish

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¹ Cengiz Orhonlu, "The Ottoman Turks Settle in Cyprus (1570-1580)" (in Turkish), in *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi (14-19 Nisan 1969)*, *Türk Heyeti Tebliğleri* [Papers of the Turkish delegation in the first international congress of Cypriot studies], (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1971), p. 100.

² Orhonlu, *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, p. 97.

³ According to the 1572 census 76 villages in the Mesaoria and Mazotos regions were empty: Orhonlu, *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, p. 93. Quoting B. Sagredo in des Mas Latrie, *Histoire De L'île de Chypre*, III, Paris 1855, p. 542, Halil İnalçık wrote that "in 1562 there were 246 villages belonging to the State and were described as 'Real' while those belonging to the mobility and the Church numbered 567": Halil İnalçık, *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, p. 64.

names. The Sultan, realizing that the island needed human resources for labour, issued a firman which was sent to the Kadis (local judges) of six Anatolian provinces: Karaman, Ichel, Bozok, Alaiye (Alanya), Teke (Antalya) and Manavgat. One in every ten families living in those provinces was ordered to transfer to the island, which meant a total of 5,720 families; at the end, only 1,689 families settled in Cyprus.⁴

According to the Register Book of 1581, there were plans to transfer 12,000 families, but eventually only 8,000 families were transported. In the following years, other Turkish families from Konya, Kirsehir, Chorum, Samsun, Chankiri, Eskisehir, Ankara, Darende and Ushak settled in the towns,⁵ which were surrounded by fortified walls or had castles (Nicosia, Famagusta, Limassol, Paphos and Kyrenia), and in the deserted Latin villages.

Later the Anatolian settlers, who were mainly Turkmen artisans and villagers, intermingled with the Greeks of the island and cooperated with them in every field of life. Although the two communities belonged to different religions and had dissimilar ethnic distinctive features, they lived harmoniously, influencing each other as they worked side by side in the rural and urban areas.⁶ In the course of 300 years of coexistence, during the Ottoman domination, some Christian Greeks converted to Islam in order to avoid high taxation. In some other cases, some Anatolian Moslems converted to Christianity.⁷ Analysing the situation, Ronald C. Jennings wrote:

In the decades following the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus many of the island's *Christians converted to Islam*. Contemporary observers and modern scholars have attributed that conversion to official compulsion, but no contemporary local sources substantiate that view except a few travelers embarrassed at the circumstances (as Venetians or Christians) who had no way of guessing how the new converts really felt. Although the level of conversion cannot be measured precisely, there are several indicators of its extent. In 1593-1595 32% of the adult male Muslims whose names and fathers' names were cited as legal agents (vekil) were converts, as were 28% of those names as witnesses to legal cases and 41% of those named as instrumental witnesses. More than a third of such Muslims appearing in court at that time were converts. What the highest proportion ever reached was or when it was reached can only be conjectured, but obviously the intensity was temporary.⁸

There was another category of Cypriots, called *Linobambaki* that they were Crypto-Christians. This community of Cypriots was living in villages like Louroudjina (originally Laurentia), Potamia, Monagria, Ayios Sozomenos and some villages of Tylliria that were formerly estates of the Latins, who converted en masse to Islam.⁹ Theodoros Papadopoulos gave an example of *conversions from Christianity into Islam* between 1825 and 1832, when in 16 villages, the percentage of the previously Christian population changed into the Moslem religion. By 1960, nine of them (Marki, Givisili, Melounda, Kouklia, Sinda, Prastio, Malunda, Kantou, Platanissos) were all Moslem, two

⁴ Orhonlu, *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, p. 94

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.100.

⁶ Ahmet Djavit An, "Origins of Turkish Cypriots", *Cyprus Today*, Vol. XLVI, No. 2, April-June 2008, pp.13-21.

⁷ Letter of Mehmet Ziyai Efendi to Sublime Porte ("Bab-ı Ali" in İstanbul) dated 22 February 1910, quoted by Mustafa Haşim Altan, *Kıbrıs'ta Rumlaştırma Hareketleri* [Movements for Greek conversions in Cyprus], 2nd edn (Kyrenia: Milli Arşiv, 2000), pp. 9-10; also M. Nabî, "Nüfus Sayımı-2", *Hürsöz*, 15 June 1947.

⁸ Author's emphasis; Ronald C. Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571-1640*, New York University Studies in Near Eastern Civilization XVIII (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 137.

⁹ Alkan Chaglar, *Toplum Postası*, London, 5 August 1981.

villages (Skoulli, Monagri) were all Christian, and the remaining five villages (Denia, Flasou, Palekithro, Syngراسي, Moniatis) had one third of their village population as Moslems.¹⁰

Paschalis M. Kitromilides pointed out that *the names of Christian Saints borne by several Turkish villages*, especially in the Paphos and the Karpasia regions, offer a convincing indication of Islamization. These are the following Turkish Cypriot villages: in Paphos district, Ayyanni (Agios Ioannis), Aynikola (Agios Nikolaos), Ayyorgi (Agios Georgios); in Limassol district, Aytuma (Agios Thomas); in Nicosia district, Aybifan (Agios Epiphantos); in Famagusta district, Ayharida (Agios Chariton); in Karpasia; Hirsofu (Agios Iakovos), Ayandroniko (Agios Andronikos), Ayistar (Agios Efstathios), Aysimyo (Agios Symeon).¹¹ Kitromilides notably wrote:

It should be made clear in this connection that this sort of evidence is not cited here in order to question the Turkish Cypriots' Turkishness – which as is the case with modern national identity generally, has to do more with the states of consciousness and less with the 'purity' of ethnic origins.¹²

The Moslem identity of the Turkish Cypriots

After the conquest of Cyprus in 1571, the traditional Ottoman settlement system brought a new ethnological and cultural element to the island. The Anatolian Moslems had a different religion, language and culture than the island's Christian population. The Latin Catholic Church did not oppress the Orthodox Christians anymore, and the Latins (Lusignans and Venetians) were allowed to stay in Cyprus if they would choose the religion of the conqueror, Islam, or the religion of the local Cypriot Orthodox people.¹³ According to the Ottoman millet system, there were two millets on the island. One was the Moslem millet and the other was the (Christian) Rum¹⁴ millet. The Orthodox Christian Church and its Archbishop was responsible from the Christian population and later he was given the right to collect the taxes for the Ottoman Governor.

The Moslem community was mainly *Sunni-Islam* following the *Hanefi sect*. There were a *Muftü* for religious affairs, a *Chief Kadı* appointed from Istanbul for judicial matters, and a *Mulla* as the deputy of the Ottoman Governor. From 1571 up to 1839, when a legal reform (Tanzimat) was proclaimed, the *Moslem sacred Sheri Law* was applied for the Moslem population; the Sheri Laws derived mainly from verses of the Koran and from traditions of Prophet Mohammed. Sometimes the Orthodox Christians themselves applied to the Sheri Courts in order to solve their disagreements with the Moslems in Cyprus. The Anatolian settlers believed in Islam, but they were not all following *strictly the Sunni sect*; some followed other sufi orders. For example, the tanners in Nicosia had their own lodge, called "Ahi Revan Dede", a kind of "lonca" (professional syndicate).

¹⁰ *Cyprus Today*, July-December 1967 and January-March 1968.

¹¹ Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "From coexistence to confrontation: the dynamics of ethnic conflict in Cyprus", in *Cyprus Reviewed*, ed. by Michalis Attalides (Nicosia: New Cyprus Association, 1977), pp. 35-70 (37).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ahmet An, "Changes in the ethnic and cultural structure of Cyprus after 1571" (in Turkish), in *Kıbrıs Türk Kültürü Üzerine Yazılar* [Articles on the Turkish Cypriot Culture]; (Nicosia: Ateş Matbaacılık, 1999), p. 15.

¹⁴ All the Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians that were living in Anatolia, during the period of the Eastern Roman Empire were/are called as *Rumlar* in the Turkish language. Therefore, the Greek Cypriots who used to live in the Eastern Roman Empire were also called *Rum*, i.e. *Kıbrıslı Rumlar* (Rums of Cyprus); similarly, those living in the Black Sea region, were called *Trabzonlu Rumlar* (Rums of Trebizun, Pontians). On the other hand, the word *Yunan*, which means Ionian in Arabic, is used for the Greeks living in of the state of *Yunanistan*, the Land of Ionians (Greece), after 1829. Therefore the Greeks, living outside the boundaries of Greece, are called *Rumlar* as ex-citizens of the Eastern Roman Empire, not being the citizens of Greece.

Right after the Ottoman occupation of Cyprus in 1570, various *Vakfs*¹⁵ were created for the assistance of the Moslem community in their religious, social and cultural needs. Since the Ottoman conquerer of Cyprus, Lala Mustafa Pasha, was a devotee of the *Mevlevi order*, a *Tekke*¹⁶ was built in Nicosia, near the Kyrenia gate, soon after the conquest; the Mevlevi Tekke functioned until the beginning of the 1950's. Another Tekke of the *Jelveti order* was built in Famagusta, which had a library founded by Kutup Osman Efendi, the Grand Şeyh of this order. Aziziye Tekke, within the municipality market of Nicosia, founded in the name of the Müftü of the Ottoman Army that conquered Nicosia in 1570, was following the *Rifai order*. C. F. Beckingham wrote in 1955:

The dervish orders, which still have secret adherents in Turkey, were not strong in Cyprus. At present there is one Mevlevi tekke in Nicosia. [...] Most Cypriot Muslims would prefer to close the tekke and use its income for the repair of mosques, the payment of hocas and religious education. It is felt that the Mevlevi ritual has lost all religious significance and has become, as one Muslim said, 'a floor-show for tourists'.

Formerly other dervish orders had a few adherents. There were Qadiris in Nicosia at the time of British occupation and there was once a small Bektāşi community in Larnaca; these have now disappeared. In Turkey many of the dervish orders were, or became, xenophobe. Their comparative absence from Cyprus, doubtlessly, helped the spread of modern ideas. The *general character of Cypriot Islam is liberal and tolerant*, and in this the Mufti reflects the attitude of the community. The social changes associated with Ataturk's revolution were introduced into Cyprus without encountering the opposition of mullas, as they did in some parts of Turkey.¹⁷

When the British occupation began in 1878, the administration of *Evkaf* (Moslem pious organization) was entrusted to two delegates; a British, and a Moslem Turk who was appointed by the "Sublime Porte" (Ottoman Empire). The annexation of Cyprus (1914) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) brought a change in the status of the island; when the post of the Turkish delegate vacated in 1925, after the death of Musa İrfan Bey, the appointment was made by the British authorities (Colonial Office), which was subsequently confirmed by a British Order-in-Council in 1928.¹⁸ The Moslem members of the Legislative Council, led by Hacı Hafız Ziyai Efendi, protested to the British colonial government and claimed that the Caliph should appoint the director of Evkaf, and that the Cyprus Kadı should be considered as the head of Evkaf.

Vedjhi Efendi, who was the Kadı of Cyprus, supported this thesis. Already in 1902, the Governor of Cyprus informed the Kadı by telegram that the management of the Evkaf would be carried out by the Kadı of Cyprus; advocate Fadil Korkut wrote that he was among the congregation when this telegram was openly read in the Agia Sophia Mosque in Nicosia. Vedjhi Efendi was not able to take the necessary steps to implement the transfer of administration to Evkaf, since he got a mental disease; eventually Hacı Hafız Ziyai Efendi withdrew from the Legislative Council and become the Müftü of Cyprus. The Turkish Cypriot delegate of Evkaf, Musa İrfan Bey, who was appointed in 1903, started to behave as the leader of the Moslem community by using his authority

¹⁵ Evkaf is a religious institution in Islam. The legal definition of Vakf (Evkaf is the plural of Vakf) is the tying up of the property for the sake of God and to earn the Divine Mercy, with ultimate imposition of interdiction on its transfer to persons contrary to the conditions of dedication. The term is equivalent of "dedication".

¹⁶ A Tekke (convent) is a place where Dervishes belonging to a cult used to stay and carry out their prayers and religious ceremonies.

¹⁷ Author's emphasis, C. F. Beckingham, "Islam in Cyprus", *The Islamic Quarterly*, vol. II, no. 2, July 1955, p. 140.

¹⁸ M. Kemal Dizdar, "Cyprus Evkaf" (in Turkish), in *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, p. 211.

at the Evkaf. He also adopted a policy of allocating the Moslem memberships of the Legislative Council to the candidates of the Evkaf. He gave 10,000 pounds credit to the candidates from the Evkaf Treasure, but later there were difficulties to get the Evkaf money back.

When Numan Efendi was appointed to the post of Kadı of Cyprus in 1907, he demanded again to get the administration of Evkaf to his office. It was in this year, when Dr. Hafız Djemal Bey (Lokman Hekim) settled in his own country and started to publish a newspaper and more than 20 booklets for the enlightenment of the Turkish Cypriot community. He also opened his Cyprus Industrial School in Nicosia, where young boys were taught various handworks and they used to sell their products in the Friday Market. In the evening classes, people were taught foreign languages. But the reactionary circles fought against him until he left the island for good in 1909.

A National Council (Meclisi-i Milli) convened under the leadership of Müftü Ziyai Efendi on 10 December 1918 in order to raise the demands of the Turkish Cypriots in the Paris Conference, where the Greek Cypriots would participate. We read from its resolution that Müftü Ziyai Efendi was elected as the head of the millet (reis-i millet), defining the Müftü for the first time as the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community. But the local British government did not allow him to go abroad.

When the "Organization of Islam Community" (Cemaat-ı İslamiye Teşkilatı) was established in 1924, as the first political association of the Turkish Cypriots, it demanded that the administration of the Evkaf should be handed over to a commission to be elected among the community. There was no positive outcome and when Münir Bey was appointed as the Turkish delegate of Evkaf in 1925, after the death of İrfan Bey, the government had two delegates, instead of one. Evkaf should have been handed over to its real owner, the Turkish Cypriot community, but the Lausanne Agreement had already abolished the Cyprus Convention, which provided for the British Administration to appoint one of the Evkaf delegates.¹⁹

In 1928, the Evkaf Department was established by a decree issued by the colonial government, which gave special privileges to the director of the department. After the Lausanne Agreement, the Evkaf properties in the Balkan countries and Palestine were to be administered by a commission but this prospect was not implemented in Cyprus and therefore there was no say anymore on the administration of the Evkaf properties by the Turkish Cypriot community. On the other hand, the Greek Orthodox Church continued to administer the Church properties in Cyprus.

Starting from 1923, when the Republic of Turkey was declared, there was no Califdom and no Minister for Religious Affairs anymore in modern Turkey. The British Colonial Government abolished the post of Müftü, starting from 19 November 1928, and this was an important event, since the Moslem population had this institution since 1571. Instead of Müftü, the post of Fetva Emini was created under the Evkaf Department and Hürremzade Hakkı Efendi was appointed there. He was supporting the Kemalists and also made a meeting together with the teacher for replacing the Arabic alphabet with the Latin at the schools. Now the authority of the Evkaf director was reinforced and Münir Bey was regarded as the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community and was invited as such at the Royal Garden party in London in 1928.

The Sheri Courts were in a deplorable state, functioning in Cyprus as if the island was still in Ottoman 19th Century. In 1927, the Cyprus Courts of Justice Order-in-Council limited the jurisdiction of the Sheri Courts to strictly Moslem religious matters and provided for appeals by the

¹⁹ Fadıl N. Korkut, *31 Mart 1947 tarihinde Kıbrısta Mevcut Türk Kurumları Namına Ekselâns Valiye Takdim Edilen Arızada Hükümetten Talep Edilen Haklarımızdan 2ncisi EVKAF* [Evkaf, the second of our rights, being demanded from the government in an application given to his excellency the governor in the name of the existing Turkish institutions in Cyprus on 31 March 1947], (Nicosia: Hür Söz Basımevi, 1947).

Supreme Court. This was established in conformity with the view of a report prepared by three leading Turkish Cypriots, Münir Bey, M. Raif and M. Shevket. Cingizzade Mehmet Rifat wrote a series of open letters to the British Governor of Cyprus, between 10 December 1932 and 11 March 1933, in his newspaper *Masum Millet* for the modernization of the Sheri Courts, and the Inheritance Law, similar to the reforms implemented in Turkey since 1926, as well as the matters of Müftü and Evkaf.

In 1930, Münir Bey lost his seat at the Legislative Council to the Kemalist leader Necati Bey, who voted later in April 1931 against the Customs Tax Law together with the Greek Cypriot members. In May 1931, Necati Bey convened a National Congress, where a new Müftü was elected for the Turkish Cypriots, but the colonial government did not recognize this officially. When the British appointed in 1951 Yakup Celal Menzilcioğlu, aged 72, as temporary Müftü from Turkey, his preaching was strongly criticized by the Kemalists of the Turkish Cypriot community; uncoincidentally, after six months the anti-Kemalist Menzilcioglu resigned and left Cyprus. Necati Özkan supported again another candidate from Turkey, Mahmut Kamil Toker, for the post of Müftü against the candidate of the National Party of Dr. Küçük, Dana Efendi. But Toker was forced to withdraw his candidacy before coming to the island and the only candidate from Paphos, Dana Efendi, was eventually elected on 30 December 1953 as the new Müftü of Cypriot Muslims.

There has been a religious movement among the Turkish Cypriot community, which was mainly represented by Şeyh Nazım Hoca, a Turkish Cypriot follower of the *Nakshibendi order*, which was active, especially, between the years 1945 and 1949 and later in 1954. Those activities were well documented by one of his followers, Hüseyin Mehmet Ateşin, in his book *Dr. Fazıl Küçük and Şeyh Nazım Kıbrısı*, (İstanbul, 1997). The book reflected the ideological struggle between Dr. Fazıl Küçük, (who was supporting Kemalism and modern Turkey in Cyprus in his activities for winning the leadership of his community) and Nazım Hoca, (who was an anti-Kemalist.) The same writer wrote also the history of the Islamic movement among the Turkish Cypriots in *Kıbrıs'ta İslami Kimlik Davası* [The case of Islamic Identity in Cyprus] (İstanbul 1996).²⁰

Religious education

Eleven "Sibyan" schools were opened between 1571 and 1600 for the elementary education. In 1632 "Büyük Medrese" and in 1640 "Küçük Medrese" were founded for the young people, who wanted to acquire religious and legal knowledge. Rich philanthropist Turkish Cypriots established these schools, and formed vakıf for the financing of these educational institutions, therefore placing the schools under the administration of the Evkaf. From the Vakf Registers, it is observed that some of these philanthropists belonged to religious orders and had appointed their own caretakers for financing the activities of these vakıf properties.²¹

The first modern secondary school (Rüştiye) was opened in 1862 and in 1897 the first modern gymnasium (İdadi) followed. In 1922, it was called "Sultani", but after the foundation of Turkey, the name was changed into "Cyprus Turkish Lycee". The British colonial government appointed in 1937 an English headmaster to the Lycee, Mr. Wood, who changed the name, all of a

²⁰ Ahmet An, "The role of religion in Turkish Cypriot community" (in Turkish), *Kıbrıslı Turkun Sesi Dergisi*, 27 September 1996, <http://can-kibrisim.blogspot.com.cy/2014/01/kibris-turk-toplumunda-dinin-yeri.html> [accessed 5 July 2016]; Ahmet An, "Religion and society in the 2000's" (in Turkish), *Kıbrıslı Turkun Sesi Dergisi*, December 1997, <http://can-kibrisim.blogspot.com.cy/2014/01/2000li-yillarda-din-ve-toplum.html> [accessed 5 July 2016].

²¹ Ali Süha, "Turkish Education in Cyprus" (in Turkish), in *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, pp. 235-237.

sudden, into “Cyprus Islam Lycee”. The Turkish Cypriot community could use the original name only in 1950, when a Turkish Cypriot Headmaster was appointed to the Lycee.

In 1932, Münir Bey established a Moslem Theological School in order to replace the Büyük Medrese, which was demolished. Advocate Mehmet Rifat (Con Rifat), who was one of the supporters of the Kemalist populist movement, criticized in his newspaper *Masum Millet* [Innocent Nation] the establishment of a Theological School in Cyprus. In the first year, there were only two students and three teachers. From 1932 until 1949, in 16 years, only 8 imams graduated from this school; in addition, two persons, one coming from Solia and the other from Tilliria also took a short course. While there were about 300 mosques over the island, the qualified imams were not more than two dozens. Many mosques were without imams and prayers were officiated there only at great intervals, twice a year, by qualified persons. The Moslem Theological School in Nicosia was eventually closed in 1949.²²

The *Interim Report on Turkish Cypriot Affairs* was prepared in 1949 by exclusively Turkish Cypriot members, who collected data on all relevant subjects (Evkaf, Müftü, Family Laws, Sherie Courts, Schools) from official and non-official quarters, and five public meetings were held in all towns of the island other than Kyrenia. The Turkish Cypriot press gave also considerable prominence to its deliberations. Therefore, these recommendations had gained general approval and represented a fair reflection of the desires and opinions of the Turkish Cypriot community. Thus the Turkish Family Courts Law and Marriage and Divorce Law came into force in 1951 and later amended in 1954.²³ There were reactions by Şeyh Nazım Hoca, who published a leaflet “Family Law is contrary to the Sheria”, but he was attacked by Dr. Küçük in *Halkın Sesi*, on 25 May 1950. Another political opponent of Dr.Küçük, Necati Özkan, wrote a series of articles in his own newspaper *İstiklal* (28 May-11 June 1950). The Turkish Religious Head (Müftü) Law was enacted in 1953 and provided for an indirect election; in 1954 the Turkish Cypriot community elected Dana Efendi as the Müftü for the first time after 27 years. The transfer of the management of Evkaf properties was made officially on 14 April 1956. The administration of the Turkish Cypriot schools was handed over to the Turkish Cypriot community on 9 June 1959.

The traditional Turkish Cypriot mosques

After the conquest of the island in 1571, the Ottomans were impressed with the Latin cathedrals in Nicosia and Famagusta and they converted them into mosques by adding minarets and other Islamic elements. Besides these and other conversions, mosques were built by the Turks in various periods in Ottoman style. Those of architectural interest are Arabahmet, Sarayönü and Turunçlu in Nicosia, Seyit Mehmet Ağa and Hala Sultan in Larnaca, Haydar Paşazade Mehmet Bey in Lapithos, Cafer Paşa in Kyrenia and Camii Cedid in Limassol. The mosques in the villages have tiled roofs, carried by one or two rows of high arches, giving the interior a spacious atmosphere.²⁴ Most of the mosques in rural areas did not have minaret, because they were modest buildings for the villagers built by Evkaf. Some writers insist that they represent the Alevite sect in Cyprus; but they have nothing to do with the “Cemevi”, where the Alevites perform their rituals.

²² 1949 *Interim Report of the Committee on Turkish Affairs: An Investigation into Matters Concerning and Affecting the Turkish Community in Cyprus* (in Turkish), (Nicosia; Cyprus Government Printing Office, 1950), p.70.

²³ Ahmet An, *A Short Overview on the Past of the Turkish Law Institutions in Cyprus, Articles on Turkish Cypriot Culture* (in Turkish), Nicosia, 1999, p.89.

²⁴ Hakkı M. Atun, “The Influence of Ottoman Architecture in Cyprus” (in Turkish), in *Milletlerarası Birinci Kıbrıs Tetkikleri Kongresi*, pp. 262-263.

The Islamization of the northern part of the island

Islamization activities of the occupied parts of the island started right after the invasion and occupation in 1974. Churches were transformed into mosques in the main towns and villages. Religious propaganda went parallel with the increasing activities of the religious parties in Turkey. When Müftü Dana Efendi retired on 1 September 1971, his deputy, Dr. Rifat Mustafa was appointed as Müftü. The Turkish Cypriot Islam Association was founded already in 1971 with a publication of a fortnightly newspaper *Her şeyde ve her yerde milli ve dini NİZAM* [National and religious ORDER in everything and at everywhere], on 5 February 1971, which ceased its publication with issue 38 on 19 July 1974. Right wing and religiously oriented columnists from *Tercüman* newspaper, Ahmet Kabaklı and Ergun Göze, were invited to Cyprus in February 1974; it was a kind of revival of the Şeyh Nazım movement.

A second religious association “Cyprus Turkish Islam Cultural Association” was re-activated after 1974. One of its activities was a conference organized in Kyrenia in June 1977. The chairman of the Association accused the Turkish Cypriots as being “Gavur” (infidel to Islam): “Unless Islam disseminates now or in the future in Cyprus, they shall stay as Gavur as they are today”.²⁵ The insult provoked Dr. Fazıl Küçük to reply in a series of articles in his daily *Halkın Sesi* for five days, under the title “Tongues with spikes”. On 12 July 1977 he wrote:

They have given permission to those members from the Koran courses that are spreading across the island and they are practicing as imams and preachers. The administration should be more sensitive in their duties. [...] We are embarrassed from the words of those, who came from mountain or forest villages. They don't know how to walk properly on the street, with their wide trousers. They are chewing the sentence ‘You are bastards of the British, gavurs, without any religion’ and they passed the limits of tolerance. We don't know what will happen and what will be the result, when there will be no tolerance for these curses. [...] Our arms are open for the Ataturkist imams and preachers and we can share our bread with them. These associations have become hearths of disaster. These Islam associations should be closed without any further delay. Although everyone is free to open an association according to the constitution, but the government has the right to close them, when they engage in dangerous activities. [...] There is no authority today, who will force them to withdraw their long tongues back into their mouth, who says ‘We shall make you, the gavur Turks, Moslem’.²⁶

He further wrote that he had received a letter about the activities of Süleymanist missionaries, who were employed by the Müftü Mustafa Rifat that they were teaching Arabic to the youth in Famagusta and giving conferences without getting permission in the villages, where they accused the Turkish Cypriots of not being religious enough. *Halkın Sesi* reported one year later, on 11 August 1978, that Koran courses were organized in a mosque in Famagusta and the children were told not to watch TV, because it was a sin; small boys were not allowed to wear short trousers and they could not learn by heart to sing the prayers properly at the minarets.

The growth of mosques and Islam in occupied Cyprus

There were approximately 300 mosques in Cyprus before 1974. Many of them in the rural areas did not have minarets and between 1968 and 1974 minarets were built to some mosques like the ones

²⁵ *Halkın Sesi*, 11 June 1977.

²⁶ Dr Fazıl Küçük, “Dikenli diller” [Tongues with spikes], *Halkın Sesi*, 12 July 1977.

at Krini, Fota and Agirda. At the end of 1991, there were 141 mosques in the occupied areas, but 58 of them did not have imams for performing the religious prayers. By 1999 the Department for Religious Affairs – with a personnel of 13 – employed 135 imams in all the mosques (only 5 of them were graduates of a Theological Faculty), plus 56 imams were appointed from Turkey. According to the official numbers, at the end of 2012 there were 199 mosques in the ‘TRNC’ excluding those in construction; in those mosques, 255 imam and muezzin were employed. Furthermore, there were another 103 imams, who were paid by the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia. Thus the total number of imams – including the three imams working in the southern part of the island – is 361 of whom only ten are permanently employed while the rest are on a contact basis.²⁷ In 2014, there were 260 imams, who were paid from the budget of the Prime Ministry of the ‘TRNC’, but only 13 of them were on the permanent staff-list. Another 120 imams received their salaries from the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia.²⁸

Nine mosques were built between 1974 and 2002 in various towns and villages in the occupied areas with the finances of the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia. One of them is the big mosque, built in Anatolian style in Kyrenia in 1999 and it was named after Nurettin Ersin Pasha, the Turkish commander of the 1974 invasion forces. It was followed, in 2003, by another big mosque that was built in Famagusta and was named after Fazıl Polat Pasha, the Turkish commander who occupied Famagusta in 1974. In the summer of 2005, there were a total of 173 mosques and a budget of 3.5 million TL was allocated in order to build 12 new mosques. During the AKP government, starting with the year 2002, out of 39 newly built mosques, 37 were in occupied Greek Cypriot villages; they were all reduced-size copies of the big mosque built in Kyrenia, either with one or two minarets.²⁹

The Turkish Cypriots perceive these Islamization activities with concern. For example the Trade Union of Turkish Cypriot Teachers (KTOS) issued a statement and criticized the ongoing Koran courses and new schools for religious education:

There are 192 mosques in the TRNC, whereas there are 160 schools, 21 health centres and 17 hospitals. Each university wants to build a mosque and these plans increased the controversies. [...] They say that they got permission from the Ministry of Education, but there are Koran courses ongoing in the mosques, without permission and controls. If the government does not have the power to control these places, they should resign.³⁰

The Trade Union of the Turkish Cypriots Secondary School Teachers (KTOEÖS) protested for a teacher that was appointed from Turkey, at the Polatpaşa Lycee, because the pupils did not like the way he was teaching the lesson of “Religious Culture and Ethics”.³¹ The parents’ association of the same school made a demonstration and criticized the Ministry of Education that there was no inspection how the teachers for religion perform their duties.³² The chairman of KTOS, Semen Saygun, remarked that there were 2,000 pupils, who were participating at the Koran courses during the 2012 summer season while in 2015 the number increased to 5,000. She said that it was not

²⁷ *Havadis*, 6 December 2012.

²⁸ *Afrika*, 18 August 2014.

²⁹ Mete Hatay, “‘Direnis’ Minarelerinden ‘Vesayet’ Minarelerine”, *Afrika*, 17 October 2014, p. 19.

³⁰ KTÖS Press release, *Kıbrıs*, 5 August 2012.

³¹ *Yenidüzen*, 29 December 2015.

³² *Kıbrıs*, 16 February 2016.

pedagogically appropriate for the immature children to have these courses instead of playing games, resting or spending time with their own families.³³

Turkish Cypriot reaction

The majority of the Turkish Cypriots does not like that that religious belief is mixed with politics in a show off and are against using religion for political purposes. Therefore they do not approve mass propaganda for Islam, done by the various religious associations, mainly set up by Anatolian settlers and students. There have always been religious people among the Turkish Cypriot community, but they were in minority and not so fanatic. Some religious Turkish Cypriots formed in cooperation with Turkish settlers some political parties, which were based on religious programs, but they did not have any success: “Reform and Welfare Party” (1979), “Our party” (1998). When the followers of Şeyh Nazım convened on 22 December 1996 in Nicosia at a meeting under the name “*Great Islam Congress*”, Şeyh Nazım defined the Turkish Cypriot as “a different kind of human, who is clever and has many demonic ideas. There is a need to have someone, who can imprison the demon in a bottle. Those imams, who are sent from Turkey, do not know the Turkish Cypriots. I can convince millions, but in the last 60 years, I got tired of trying to convince this millet (of Turkish Cypriots)!”³⁴

Since the population of the Anatolian settlers is more than the local Turkish Cypriots in the occupied areas at the moment, religious events and activities are organized mainly for them by various associations and organizations that are financed by the Turkish Embassy in Nicosia or some reactionary Arabic countries, and enjoy the support of the ‘TRNC’ government. Last year the Evkaf distributed 5,000 packages of food, sent by the General Directorate of the Vakıfs in Turkey. During the Ramadan month, when the Moslems do not eat or drink anything during the daytime, 100,000 persons had the chance to have dinner on 14 meeting-points in various towns and villages, under the organization of the “Red Crescent Association of Northern Cyprus” with the support of the Turkish Embassy Aid Department in Nicosia; since 2005, it has been a traditional event. Similar dinners were given also by the Evkaf Department, the Turkish Cypriot Islam Association and the Universal Love and Brotherhood Association (ESKAD).³⁵

At the moment there are 600 students at the two theological faculties, one at the Near East University (YDU) and the other one at the University of Social Sciences [Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi], while another 800 pupils attend the Theological Colleges. Almost all of the students and teenage pupils are from Turkey who came to the occupied areas with scholarships while a small number are the children of Anatolian settlers; the teachers are all coming from Turkey. The newly established Hala Sultan Theological College is part of the big complex with a boarding house, a large mosque, conference rooms and shops that will cost 80 million dollars. The Hala Sultan Mosque with its four tall minarets – a small replica of the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne – will be ready by 2017 at a total cost of 30 million dollars. Another large mosque with six minarets is being constructed at the Near East University and is expected to be completed by 2017.

It is interesting to note that an Anatolian settler, professor Talip Atalay – also an unsuccessful AKP candidate at the 2015 general elections – who settled with his family in occupied Famagusta in 1975, when he was 7 years old, was appointed by Ankara, in 2010, as the Muftü of Cyprus. His employment as the Director of the Religious Affairs, was accompanied by the purchase

³³ *Kıbrıs*, 11 July 2015.

³⁴ Quoted by Ahmet An, “Kıbrıs Türk Toplumunda Dinin Yeri” [Place of Religion in Turkish Cypriot Society] *Kıbrıslı* magazine, no. 14, 27 September 1996.

³⁵ *Kıbrıs*, 18 June 2015.

of two Mercedes and three BMW cars for his Department, which caused criticism by the Trade Union “Hizmet-Sen” in the Turkish Cypriot press.³⁶ Talip Atalay, a professor of theology, represents the Turkish Cypriot community in its relations with the Cyprus Greek Orthodox Church and he is welcomed by the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus, although he is not a local Turkish Cypriot. The Anatolian settlers can visit now the Hala Sultan Tekke during Moslem Holidays. Since 2014, four such visits were organized with the participation of more than one thousand visitors in each time, comprising mainly of Turkish citizens!³⁷

³⁶ *Afrika*, 5 March 2014.

³⁷ *Kıbrıs*, 11 December 2015.