

## CYPRUS IN 1821. A REPORT TO THE LEVANT COMPANY AND THE LAYERS OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

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On 31 December 1821, Antonio Vondiziano, representative of the Levant Company in Larnaca, Cyprus sat at his desk in the comfortable surroundings of his house, nicely appointed with imported European furniture, to write his report to their magnificences, the Governors of the Company. The British Vice Consul must have felt relief. A terrible year for the island was drawing to its unhappy end. He also must have felt a slight embarrassment. He had not written to the Company for two whole years, since 31 December 1819. Business had been slow, British ships or ships under British protection only very rarely called at Cyprus' only port at Larnaca. There had been neither business news nor profits worth reporting. So the Consul had remained silent for two years.

Antonio Vondiziano belonged to a Cephalonian family that had settled in Larnaca toward the middle of the eighteenth century<sup>1</sup>. Around that time, Antonio's father Paul or Paolo Vondiziano, a well known physician, had moved to the island and became quite successful by virtue of his professional expertise. He had risen to prominence thanks to his services in taking care of the wounded following the rising of the Christians and Muslims of the island against the rapacity of the governor Jill Osman in October 1764<sup>2</sup>. Paul Vondiziano's son Antonio was born in 1755. He was said to have been trained in foreign languages in Paris and in law in London but this is doubtful on the evidence of the quality of his French in the report published below. He is also said to have served in the British Embassy to the Sublime Porte and later until 1799 he served at the chancery of the British Consulate in Larnaca<sup>3</sup>. In that year he was appointed Vice Consul of the Levant Company and exercised these functions until his death in 1838.

<sup>1</sup> The main source on Antonio Vondiziano as British Vice Consul is Sir Harry Luke, *Cyprus under the Turks 1571–1878. A Record based on the Archives of the English Consulate in Cyprus under the Levant Company and After*, London 1969, pp. 7, 99, 104, 118, 128, 146, 153, 176. See also A. C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company*, London 1964, p. 196. For a biographical sketch see A. Coudounaris, *Μερικά παλαιά οικογένεια της Κύπρου*, Nicosia 1972, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See P. M. Kitromilides, «Repression and Protest in Traditional Society. Cyprus 1764», *Κυπριακά Σπουδαί* 46 (1983), pp. 91–101, esp. pp. 97 and 99. See also idem, *Κοινωνικές σχέσεις και νοοτροπίες στην Κύπρο του δεκάτου ογδόου αιώνα*, Nicosia 1992, pp. 26 and 28.

<sup>3</sup> Luke, *Cyprus under the Turks*, p. 118.

A glimpse into the social world of Antonio Vondiziano and of the consular corps in Larnaca, which included the consuls of France, Russia, Austria and Spain, is provided in the account of his 1815 visit to Cyprus by William Turner. Having been formerly attached to the British ambassador in Constantinople, Sir Robert Liston, Turner arrived in Larnaca with a letter of introduction to the local British Consul and stayed at Vondiziano's house<sup>4</sup>:

I went to the house of the English consul to whom I delivered despatches from Mr. Liston, and who received me with the greatest hospitality, and put me into a very neat room, where I soon forgot the fatigues of my voyage in a good bed, which was the more acceptable, as I had slept on boards in the boat without pulling off my clothes. Mr Vondiziano, my host, is a man in easy circumstances (a native of Cephalonia), whose family consists of a wife and five daughters. [...] When I rose in the morning I was happy to find myself in the house of a British consul, who keeps up the dignity of his character. He has the King's Arms over the door of his house, at which two janizaries are stationed. [...] Mr. Vondiziano, with all the expenses of the consulate, a wife and five children, a large house, six servants, two janizaries, a carriage, horse and mule, spends only 5000 piastres a year [...]. In the morning I went with Signor Vondiziano (who put himself in grand state, with a large cocked hat which he always wears, even in the house, a gold-headed cane, and proceeded by a janizary) to visit the Austrian consul, who lived in a good house near us [...]

Through their lifestyle and social comportment Antonio Vondiziano and his wife acquired considerable reputation which extended beyond Cyprus and was recorded in a most characteristic way by Lady Hester Stanhope. After noting that as a rule the conduct of British Vice-Consuls in the Levant had been the worst possible she added: «I must make an exception in favour of the Consul in Cyprus. I do not know him personally, but from what I hear of him and his wife, they are two most honourable and estimable people»<sup>5</sup>.

All of a sudden this world of dignity, comfort and meticulously observed convention appeared to come under serious threat. Such had been the worry that motivated the report composed by Consul Vondiziano on 31 December 1821. Not only business had declined by comparison to a few years earlier, when he had reported to Turner about a much more active commercial transit in Larnaca<sup>6</sup>, but a serious political upheaval had hit the island during that year. The Consul was an experienced man. In writing to their magnificences he knew he could not allow his emotion to take the better of him. He begins his report with business, he makes

<sup>4</sup> From William B. Turner, *Journal of a Tour in the Levant*, London 1820, Vol. II, pp. 31–52, 528–594 as excerpted in C.D. Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, Cambridge 1908, pp. 424–450. See especially pp. 424–425, 427. Another English guest who enjoyed Vondiziano's hospitality six years later was John Carne of Queen's College, Cambridge. See John Carne, *Letters from the East*, third edition, London 1830, Vol. II, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> Luke, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> *Excerpta Cypria*, p. 449.

sure to insert his requests concerning his own share of the proceeds in the Company's accounts and then he turns to the tragedy of the year that was drawing to a close that evening.

There had been an insurrection in Greece earlier in the year, he writes, but the Greeks of Cyprus had no intention of joining the rebels:

*Les Grecs de Chypre ont toujours témoigné la plus  
parfaite soumission envers leurs maîtres et sans avoir  
dans aucune occasion laissé de soupçonner de leur fidélité.*

They had been perfectly loyal and submissive to their masters, paid their taxes and when called upon, on the occasion of the Greek rising, to turn in their arms, they promptly did so in order to continue to at least enjoy «*au milieu d'une vie malheureuse leur tranquillité*». The malignity of the local Ottoman governor, nevertheless, would not be satisfied. He obviously saw the occasion of the rising in Greece as an opportunity to settle once and for all his accounts with his main rivals in the control over the population and resources of the island, the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. The rivalry had been the main issue in the politics of Cyprus for a long time. It had been noted and commented upon by William Turner in 1815 and by many others<sup>7</sup>.

In fact it had been the backbone of local politics since the mid-eighteenth century and it had given occasion to many upheavals, including the rising of 1764, described by the Levant Company Consul Timothy Turner as «a great rebellion»<sup>8</sup>. It was the occasion that allowed the rise to prominence of Antonio's father Paul Vondiziano. Despite the heavy costs unfailingly incurred, the prelates usually won the contest with the local governors by appealing directly to the Sublime Porte, very often with the support of the Consuls at Larnaca<sup>9</sup>. This time, however, the Governor outmanouvered the prelates. Through false reports to the Porte he misled his superiors that the Greeks of Cyprus were on the verge of revolt: «*ne manqua pas de dépeindre par ses dépêches à Constantinople que ces infortunés insulaires Grecs entretenaient une correspondance avec les Rebelles du Grand Seigneur, et qu'ils avaient toute la bonne disposition de les imiter, énorme accusation et fausseté!*» By means of this deception the pasha obtained authorisation to execute all those suspected of being implicated in the revolutionary project. Thus the tragedy of the year 1821 set in.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 436–437, 447–448. For a general survey and appraisal see Sir George Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, Vol. IV: *The Ottoman Province, the British Colony 1571–1948*, ed. by Sir Harry Luke, Cambridge 1952, pp. 100–123. See also L. Philippou, *Η Εκκλησία Κύπρου επί Τουρκοκρατίας*, Nicosia 1975, pp. 183–202 and more recently M. N. Michael, *Η Εκκλησία της Κύπρου κατά την Οθωμανική περίοδο (1571–1878)*, Nicosia 2005, pp. 137–140, 157–162, and A. N. Mitsides, “Η Εκκλησία Κύπρου επί Τουρκοκρατίας”, *Ιστορία της Κύπρου*, ed. by Th. Papadopoulos, vol. VI, Nicosia 2011, pp. 698–709.

<sup>8</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom, SP 105/119, p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> For a survey of the period immediately preceding the events of 1821 see John Koumoulides, *Cyprus and the Greek War of Independence 1821–1829*, London 1974, pp. 27–39.

The Consul goes on to give a general account of the tragic events, without too many details and practically without names. He was too experienced to know that the authorities of the Levant Company would not be particularly interested. He does mention the events of 9 July 1821 without recording the exact date: the execution of Archbishop Kyprianos<sup>10</sup> –the only name among the victims recorded in his account– and the three bishops of the island, Chrysanthos of Paphos, Meletios of Kition and Lavrentios of Kyrenia, who are mentioned only by the titles of their dioceses, not by name. He adds that an additional number of up to one hundred and fifty senior ecclesiastics and prominent laymen were executed. Obviously the governor was trying by this carnage to totally decapitate the subject Christian population by eradicating its leadership. This was not all: the properties of the executed were confiscated and their families, formerly the most prosperous part of the population, reduced to misery and mendicity.

The European colony in Larnaca did not suffer casualties but was exposed to the direct consequences of the tragedy: they were the main creditors of the archbishop and of many of the other victims and the ruin of the Cypriot elite was threatening to bring their own ruin as well. They were left without recourse as to how to recover their money and this reduced them to desperation<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore the European colony and the Consuls were exposed to threats and insults by the troops transferred to Cyprus from Syria and Asia Minor on the alleged pretext of staving off the supposed pending revolt of the Greeks. The Consuls appealed to their superiors, the European ministers in Constantinople and they in turn secured an order from the Grand Vezir to the governor of Cyprus ordering him to respect and protect the Europeans «*qui y sont amis de la Sublime Porte*». When the order was received, with considerable delay it is true on the basis of other accounts<sup>12</sup>, things for the European colony improved. The British Consul mentions with gratitude a particular measure taken by the British Ambassador, whose name he misspells as Lord Stangford<sup>13</sup>, who secured a special Vezirial order for the more effective protection of British subjects as outstanding friends of the Porte. These are details that come to light from Consul Vondiziano's account.

Following these measures, things moved gradually back to a more normal pace. After outlining the crisis and its consequences the Consul could finish his report by returning to business as usual: reporting on the movement of ships in Cyprus waters and recording political and military news reaching the island from the Near East. An incident of piracy in November 1821 is also recorded, especially drawing attention to the anxiety and uneasiness it caused to the Turks of Cyprus.

<sup>10</sup> Kyprianos' last days, his character and overall attitude amidst the tragedy are described with great admiration by John Carne, op.cit., II, pp. 162–170. See pp. 177–179 on Kyprianos' s execution. See also Mitsides, op. cit., pp. 710–722. A complete documentary record on Kyprianos is collected in *Αρχιεπίσκοπος Κύπρου Κυπριανός. Αρχαίον Κειμένιον*, published by Machairas Monastery, Cyprus, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> On Vondiziano and the other consuls as creditors of the archbishop and other prelates and monasteries see Hill, op. cit., p. 111 and Michael, op.cit., pp. 199, 283–285.

<sup>12</sup> Hill, op. cit., p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> His Majesty's ambassador to the Sublime Porte was Stratford Canning, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe.

The full text of Antonio Vondiziano's report<sup>14</sup> is published diplomatically below:

*à Larnaca en Chypre  
le 31 Décembre 1821*

*A son Excellence  
My Lord Gouverneur et aux Nobles Membres  
de la Vénérable Compagnie du Levant  
à Londres*

*My Lord et Messieurs*

*Depuis mes derniers respects du 31 Décembre de l'année 1819, je n'ai plus osé d'écrire à votre Excellence, My Lord et Messieurs, faute de matière qui pouvoit intéresser sa Seigneurie; j'ai maintenant la gloire d'humilier ma présente et y transmettre en même tems trois différens comptes de quelque petites perceptions Consulaires sur trois navires Aglo-Maltois qui se sont fait voir dernièrement en Chypre. Ces Entrées réunies ne forment qu'en petit objet de Piastras 360 38/40 dont j'ai enregistré au crédit de leurs Seigneuries, et par contre crédité moi même de p[iastres] 103 04/40 de deux Septièmes. Sur ces mêmes Entrées dont leur Magnificence m'allouent, extrêmement fâché de voir continuer en Chypre depuis assés de tems la cessation des moyens qui me privent du doux plaisir à y être de quelque utilité aux intérêts de leurs Seigneuries ainsi que j'ai eu la satisfaction de l'être ci-devant, et pendant que la Marine marchande des autres nations, surtout des français, Autrichiens et Sardes qui est bien nombreuse et dont leur abord est fréquent en Chypre et qu'ils importent et exportent beaucoup de Marchandises, il y aura très peu à s'attendre des marins Maltois dont le // nombre de navires diminua considérablement et leur navigation dans les Mers du Levant devint insignifiant à l'exception d'Alexandrie en Egypte où quelqu'uns de leurs Bâtimens vont changer de Comestibles pour compte du Gouvernement de Malte.*

*J'ose par ma présente très humble lettre de rappeler au gracieux Souvenir de votre Excellence, My Lord et Messieurs, et d'en Supplier humblement afin qu'elle Se daigne d'ordonner au Trésorier à Constantinople de me reconnoître de la dernière Balance qui en résulte en ma faveur appert l'Extrait du Compte Courant du 31 Décembre 1819.*

*Je me crois en devoir de ne pas laisser ignorer à votre Excellence, My Lord et Messieurs, des événemens malheureux qui, ont eu lieu en Chypre en Juillet dernier à la suite de l'insurrection des Grecs en Turquie, ou pour mieux dire par méchanceté du Gouverneur de Chypre qui, à peine eut-il connoissance de cette insurrection ne manqua pas de dépeindre par Ses dépêches à Constantinople que ces infortunés insulaires Grecs entretenaient une correspondance avec les Rebelles du Grand Seigneur, et qu'ils avoient toute la bonne disposition de les imiter, énorme accusation et fausseté! puisque les Grecs de Chypre ont toujours témoigné la plus parfaite Soumission envers leurs maîtres et sans avoir dans aucune // occasion laissé de soupçonner de leur fidélité. Supportant patiemment à des impôts qui les abyment et pour preuve évidente de la docilité des Rayas*

<sup>14</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom, SP 105.139, ff. 359–361v.

*Grecs de Chypre et de leur Sentimens pacifiques, ayant été sommés au commencement du Soulèvement de leurs Patriotes de se dégarnir de toute espèce d'armes à feu etc., ils s'empressèrent tout aussitôt sans la moindre répugnance de les remettre entre les mains des préposés du Gouvernement; se flattant que n'ayant rien à se reprocher ils continueroient de jouir du moins au milieu d'une vie malheureuse leur tranquillité, mais tout cela n'a rien valu, et malheureusement pour eux à la suite des rapports dé-favorables à leur égard du Gouverneur de Chypre, reçut celui-ci un Firman du Grand Seigneur l'autorisant de faire subir la peine capitale à tous ceux qu'il reconnoitroit le mériter il n'en fallut que cela au Gouverneur pour mettre en exécution Ses exécrables desseins commençant par faire pendre l'archevêque Cyprien et ses trois Suffragans, les Evêques de Paphos, Cytium et Cerygne dont on leur trancha la tête, on fit subir le même Sort et presque en même tems à plusieurs Ecclésiastiques et les plus qualifiées parmi les Grecs au nombre de Cent Cinquante par la confiscation de leurs maisons, propriétés etc. et sans se soucier de tant de familles, réduites au désespoir et à la mendicité, ces terribles exécutions jointes aux pers- écutions contre ces // malheureux habitans Chrétiens ont ruiné de fond en comble l'île de Chypre, les Européens même établis en Chypre exerçant leur commerce, et créanciers de beaucoup du ci-devant Archevêque, de ceux qui ont été mis à mort et de beaucoup d'autres fugitifs Grecs ne savent pas comment se faire payer; et toute démarche de tous les Consuls réunis auprès de ce Gouverneur à cet égard a été inutile, ce ne sera que Messieurs les Ministres à Constantinople à qui ils s'adressèrent qui leur feront faire justice et sans permettre que nous soyons sacrifiés de la sorte, ces mêmes Européens ont été plusieurs fois exposés à des attaques et insultes des troupes étrangères dont on fit venir de Syrie et Caraman sous prétexte de défendre l'île des attaques des ennemis du dehors et pour contenir en Sujétion les habitans Grecs, le Gouverneur de son côté au lieu de reprimer l'audace de ces insolentes troupes les encourageoit en certaine façon et sans faire attention aux plaintes des Consuls, qui se virent obligés de recourir à leurs Ministres respectifs à Constantinople en leur resprésentant le procédé indigne du Gouverneur de Chypre à leur égard, et qu'ils s'empressèrent d'obtenir et remettre des lettres du Grand Visir ordonnant à ce Gouverneur de rentrer dans ses devoirs en respectant et en protégeant les Européens qui y sont amis de la Sublime Porte et de prendre bien garde d'agir différemment et qu'il y seroit responsable à de nouvelles plaintes qu'on pourroit faire passer contre lui, ces corrections produisirent // tout le bon effet dont on s'attendoit, et ce fier Gouverneur dut aussitôt changer de conduite en faveur des Consuls qu'il s'efforça de leurs témoigner de l'amitié la plus cordiale et en s'acquittant très exactement d'accueillir favorablement les affaires nationales dont on lui expose, ayant moi même reçu une lettre Visiriele que S[on] E[xcellence] Lord Strangford voulut bien m'adresser conçue d'une manière très énergique en faveur de la nation et protégés Britanniques en Chypre et dans un sens différent de celles reçu par les autres Consuls. S'aperçut le Gouverneur du grand cas dont on fait pour les Anglois, et c'est en quoi qu'il épuse tous les moyens pour me rendre content afin d'obternir de moi une lettre pour la dite Excellence de Son comportement à mon égard et de Ses protestations à ne pas donner le moindre sujet de plaintes, il faut d'ailleurs convenir que nous jouissons maintenant de tranquillité, et les Européens assés bien respectés.*

*De vaisseaux de guerre françois se font souvent voir en Chypre venant de l'Archipel et Smyrne ceux de Sa Majesté croisent toujours aux parages de Smyrne, il ne vint ici le 30 Septembre dernier que le seul Sloop Racehorse Mr Abbot Capitaine, rien que pour m'apporter le Pli de Mr l'ambassadeur, il reprit le large après trois jours pour repasser à Smyrne.*

*En Novembre dernier et pour la première fois l'on // vit croiser sur ces parages quelques corsaires insurgés, ayant même capturé de Navires et Bateaux Ottomans dont les équipages ont été débarqués sur quelque points de l'île et sans avoir été maltraités, ce qui a beaucoup rejouit les Turcs de Chypre de cet acte d'humanité de la part de leurs ennemis, d'un autre côté l'approche des insurgés causa aux habitans Turcs de grandes inquiétudes, ils y sont extrêmement alarmés veillant toutes les nuits et parcourant les endroits maritimes les plus accessibles dans la crainte de quelque descente des ennemis.*

*Par de nouvelles certaines d'Alep l'on sait que les Perssians remporterent une victoire complete contre le Basha de Bagdat poussant toujours en avant leurs avantages du côté du Kurdistan.*

*J'implore très humblement, My Lord et Messieurs, la continuation de vos bienfaits et haute protection, ne cessant toujours pénétré de la plus vive reconnaissance d'avoir l'honneur d'être avec le plus profond respect et la plus parfaite soumission*

*My Lord  
de votre Excellence*

*Le très humble, très obéissant,  
très dévoué et très soumis  
Serviteur  
Ant[onio] Vondiziano*

The British Consul's report to the Levant Company does not supply radically new information on the events of the year 1821 in Cyprus. It does corroborate the well known drama that unfolded in the summer of that year in the island as a consequence of the outbreak of the Greek war of independence and it supplies a few details, deemed worthwhile to record by the British Consul. The main value of the report as a source of evidence consists in enhancing the perspective on the events, which in their details have been mostly known through the French Consul's account<sup>15</sup>. By enhancing the documentary evidence Vondiziano's report adds nuance and texture to our knowledge of a critical and tragic episode in the history of the island, an episode of great symbolic significance in subsequent historiography.

The Consul writes with remarkable calm and phlegm as it befits a servant of the British crown. He remains silent on his own personal activities during that year of tragedy and pain for the Christian population of Cyprus. The main Greek source on the events, however, supplies details on his active support of the victims and his strenuous efforts while the events were unfolding to do whatever he could to

<sup>15</sup> Consul Méchain's letters were translated by N. Kyriazis and published in *Κυπριακά Χρονικά* VII (1930), pp. 55–75 and are Hill's primary source in the narrative of the events. See *A History of Cyprus*, IV, pp. 132–136, 142–145. See also Koumoulides, op. cit., pp. 40–65.

alleviate the pain caused by the catastrophe: he sheltered proscribed victims and their families in his residence and arranged their escape on European boats anchoring in the port of Larnaca<sup>16</sup>. He also saved the plate of the church of Chrysopolitissa in Larnaca, whereas elsewhere churches and monasteries were plundered<sup>17</sup>.

We cannot know whether the Consul exhibited the same reticence in connection with his activities on behalf of the victims in his conversations in his domestic environment. Prudence may have counselled a total silence in those dangerous times but again as it often happens in domestic environments, legends grow and are transmitted within the family. We will never know. The Consul died in 1838, surrounded by the esteem and respect of the whole island. He was buried in his official uniform and cocked hat he so much liked to wear according to the evidence of his guest William Turner.

In 1847 his nephew and namesake Antonio Vondiziano (1815–1885), the son of his younger brother Andreas, appears among the subscribers of a historical novel by Epaminondas Frangoudis<sup>18</sup>. The work in question, entitled *Thersandros*, was published in Athens and it is the romantic story of the ill-fated love of two young persons from Larnaca. The main scene of the story is located in Larnaca in the years 1821 to 1823. The chronological framework gives the Cypriot author the chance to include in his narrative, in the form of a long explanatory footnote in the very early part of the novel, a dramatic account of the tragedy of 9 July 1821<sup>19</sup>. It would be very interesting to know what subscriber Antonio Vondiziano felt and thought in reading these lines. In 1821 he was six years old and probably he remembered very little of what had taken place during that year of terror and bloodshed. He could have heard stories about the sorrow and the pathos of those years from his uncle and from his father. How did these stories compare with Frangoudis' account, which so powerfully records the crystallization of collective memory around that critical moment that was destined to form the kernel of Cyprus' modern self-conception, supplying the terms of epic and tragedy necessary for this purpose? We will never know the answers to these questions, as it is as a rule the case in connection with the way the dramatic events in the foreground of the theatre of history are experienced in the personal life of people. Reflecting on the diverse fragments of evidence presented here we are made at least aware of the unanswered questions concerning the layers of memory that form the content of collective consciousness and also supply the raw material of historical narrative.

<sup>16</sup> G. Kipiades, *Απομνημονεύματα των κατά το 1821 εν τη νήσω Κύπρω τραγικών σκηνών*. Alexandria 1888 (reprinted Nicosia 1972), p. 28. Also Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–130. See also Carne, *Letters from the East*, Vol. II, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Kipiades, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Solomon Nicolaidis, Cypriot, as he styles himself, also a victim of the events of 1821, records in his chronology of world history the tragic events of 9 July 1821 in his native island noting in particular the refuge supplied by European consuls and merchants in Lamaca to some of the victims. See S. Nicolaidis Cypriot, *Χρονολογικός Πίναξ*, Aegina 1833, pp. 154–155.

<sup>18</sup> Epaminondas I. Frangoudis, *Ο Θέρσανδρος*, Athens 1847, p. 121. The list of subscribers is omitted in the new edition of the work, Athens 2002.

<sup>19</sup> See E. I. Frangoudis, *Ο Θέρσανδρος και άλλα αφηγήματα*, ed. by L. Papaleontiou, Athens 2002, pp. 42–45.