A Land for Strangers
Non-Native Individuals and Communities in Cyprus
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A Land for Strangers, A History of Encounters

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Barbarus hic ego sum, qui non intellegar ulli.
"Here *I* am the barbarian,
the one whom no one can understand".
Ov. *Tr.* 5.10.37

I first arrived in Cyprus on a hot late-summer afternoon in 1999, stepping off the plane at Larnaca Airport as a young undergraduate student in Ancient History. The terminal was still the one hastily assembled at the end of 1974, after the Turkish military invasion of the northern part of the island had forced the closure of the International Airport at Nicosia. Waiting outside in his non-air-conditioned car was my future advisor, Professor Theodoros Mavrojannis, who had graciously come to collect me in person. He drove me to Nicosia, where I was to reside at the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI), an elegant British colonial house, built just outside the Venetian Renaissance walls of the capital and made even more charming by the quiet rhythm of ceiling fans and the shade of the trees that surrounded it. From the moment I set foot on the island, I felt at home. The warmth of the air, the stark Mediterranean landscape, the distinctive and harmonious mixture of architectural forms and, above all, the local hospitality made me feel welcomed, as someone who already belonged.

Luigi Silvano aptly opened this volume with a reflection on how, in Cyprus, one might feel like a stranger for a single day but soon

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become Cypriot for a lifetime. His words resonate deeply with me and recall the adaptability that has long shaped the island's history of encounters. Yet over the years – whether in Cyprus, elsewhere in the world or even in my own country – the quiet sense of being an enduring stranger has subtly surfaced from time to time. It does not announce itself. It arrives in stillness, in silence, in a glance, in the regular sound of a bell that drives you out of a library or in the quiet expiry of a card that no longer opens that beloved door. It is not a question of where you are, nor is it exile or rejection. It is a hidden feeling, lodged somewhere in your soul. A sudden shadow cast by movement – by leaving and arriving – by the mutable shape of one's own identity. If your nature is that of a voyager or of someone driven by voracious curiosity, part of your being will never be fully at rest in any single place.

It was perhaps this very feeling that brought an impatient and insatiable humanist like Cyriac of Ancona to spend a year of his life in Cyprus, as his fellow countryman and biographer Francesco Scalamonti suggests.[1] Cyriac's arrival in Cyprus as an entrusted agent of the Venetian merchant Zaccaria Contarini likely took place during 1428. From Ancona he travelled through Bari, Monopoli, Byzantium, Chios, Rhodes, Beirut and Damascus, before finally reaching Famagusta, a city that, until not long before, had ranked among the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan harbours in the world, but which in his time was held in isolation under Genoese control.[2]

Cyriac's actions in Cyprus remind us that the condition of the foreigner is often shaped by forms of negotiated hospitality and a restless intellectual drive. According to his biographer, his first temporary assignment on the island was to serve as vicar of the Genoese *podestà* in Famagusta. This appointment seems to exemplify a form of integration neither entirely official nor wholly improvised: it probably rested on fame and on a humanistic understanding of public office, shaped by civic duty and grounded in Roman law (*Romanas sibi leges et omnia iuris consultorum egregia dicta tum primum videre lectitareque non sine incremento peritiae et oblectatione contigerat*). Cyriac's subsequent administration of Contarini's private affairs enabled him to extend his stay in Cyprus and relocate to Nicosia, where he once again navigated overlapping spheres – political, intellectual and personal. There he conversed with the King Janus of Lusignan, whose impressive personality outshone the renown of

1 The edition of Scalamonti's account of Cyriac's stay in Cyprus is provided in Mitchell, Bodnar, Foss 2015, 56-67; see also Mitchell, Bodnar 1996, 51-6.

2 On Genoese Famagusta, see the essays collected in Grivaud, Nicolaou-Konnari, Schabel 2020, 69-362.

his name (*perbella praesentia clarum suum et eximiae laudis nomen superatum*).

Janus had only recently returned to Cyprus after a humiliating ten-month captivity in Cairo, following the Mamluk invasion of the island and his defeat at the Battle of Chirokitia in 1426.[3] Despite the kingdom's dire condition – ravaged by epidemics, social unrest and a massive peasant revolt[4] – Cyriac moved with remarkable ease at the Lusignan court, joining royal hunts and travelling across the countryside (*saepius inclyto cum rege ad venationes exercendas totam fere insulam exploravit*). He explored the island's ancient remains with the eye of an antiquarian and the precision of a businessman, copying ancient Latin and Byzantine inscriptions, acquiring old Greek manuscripts and documenting the cultural heritage of Cyprus amid the fragile splendour of a declining crusader kingdom.[5]

In a remote monastery (*ad vetustum quoddam monasterium*), Cyriac traded a volume of the Gospels with a monk for a time-worn manuscript of the *Iliad* (*antiquam Homeri Iliadem*). Later, in Nicosia, he obtained from another monk a copy of the *Odyssey*, several tragedies by Euripides and a work by Theodosius of Alexandria (*habuit et deinde alio a chalochiero in Leucosia Odissiam et Euripidis plerasque tragediasque ac Theodosii grammatici Alexandrini vetustatum codicem*). After travelling across regions and centuries, the *Iliad* once owned by Cyriac may now be preserved among the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Library,[6] while his *Odyssey* may have found its way to the Malatestiana Library in Cesena.[7] The fate of the manuscript of Euripides remains unknown, except for the fact that, following Cyriac's death, it came into the possession of his nephew in Ancona, as indicated by a set of much-debated handwritten

3 For the Mamluk raids in fifteenth-century Cyprus, see Irwin 1995.

4 A detailed analysis of the revolt and its aftermath is offered in Kyriacou 2022.

5 On Cyriac's search for inscriptions and manuscripts in Cyprus, see Calvelli 2008; 2009, 58-69.

6 London, British Library, Harley MS 5693. The manuscript, which once belonged to the libraries of Gaspare Zacchi (Gaspare da Volterra) and Antonio Seripandi, contains on f. 1*r-v* an *Alphabetum XXIIII litterarum secundum priscos Graecos scriptum manu Cyriaci Anconitani*. On this manuscript, see Leaf 1889; Pontani 1994, 124. A digitised version of the manuscript was accessible on the British Library website prior to the cyberattack of 28 October 2023.

7 Cesena, Biblioteca Malatestiana, Plut. D.XXVII.2. On the possibility that this copy of the *Odyssey* was the one acquired by Cyriac in Cyprus, see Pontani 1997, 1479; Fiaccadori 2006, 331-2.

annotations attributed to the humanist Cristoforo da Rieti.[8] Finally, Scalamonti's reference to Theodosius of Alexandria may also be interpreted as an allusion to a work that was incorrectly attributed to this late-antique grammarian.[9]

The history of the manuscripts acquired in Cyprus by Cyriac of Ancona bears witness to the material lives of texts – their circulation, survival and reinterpretation – as well as to the discernment of those who collected them. The intellectual and human engagements of individuals such as Cyriac across the island reflect many of the themes explored in this volume: the conditional nature of welcome; the agency of non-native individuals; the porous boundaries between commerce, antiquarianism and knowledge; and the island's enduring role as a place of arrival, departure and provisional belonging.

It is precisely this layered and variegated sense of belonging that lies at the heart of *A Land for Strangers* – a paradox that extends beyond individual lives and points towards a deeper, shared condition. The essays gathered in our volume offer a multifaceted exploration of the presence and impact of non-native individuals and communities in Cyprus across diverse historical moments. As we reflect on the past and its ongoing impact on the present, the pages of this book remind us that the concepts of 'local' and 'foreigner' are never fixed, but are constantly in flux – shaped by time, space and the evolving frameworks through which identity is understood and lived. As the opening quote from Ovid's *Tristia* – written during his exile on the shores of the Black Sea over two millennia ago – powerfully evokes, these meanings remain ever fluid.[10]

8 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Gr. 425, f. 59v: *Cum Ancone exularem vidi in bibliotheca Kiriaci Anconitani, viri omnium antiquitatum studiosissimi: Ptholomeum in astrologia volumen quidem pergrande et nobile, Grecis literis scriptum. Item et Homeri Yliaden. Item vidi et legi Esiodum, Herodotum, Pindarum Grece. Item Aristidem, Euripidem, Aristophanum et Sophoclem tragicos super fabulam Edipi. Item Ethicam et librum De anima Aristotelis. Item et nonnullos libros astrologie et geometrie.* […] *Item emi cum maximo desiderio totum Novum Testamentum et psalterium in Greco a nepote eiusdem Kiriaci. Item ab eodem emi Plutarchi Ethicam libros XIIII et emi ab eodem epistolas numero 155 in Greco scriptas* (While I was passing through Ancona, I saw in the library of Cyriac of Ancona, a man most passionate about all antiquities, a volume of Ptolemy on astrology, a truly vast and important work, written in Greek characters. I also saw Homer's *Iliad*. Likewise, I saw and read Hesiod, Herodotus and Pindar in Greek. Likewise, Aristides, Euripides, Aristophanes and Sophocles with their tragedies about the story of Oedipus. Also, Aristotle's *Ethics* and his book *On the Soul*. Likewise, also some books on astrology and geometry. […] Also, I eagerly purchased the entire *New Testament* and a Psalter in Greek from the nephew of that same Cyriac. From him, I also bought fourteen books of Plutarch's *Moralia* and I bought 155 letters written in Greek). See Pontani 1994, 103-16; Calvelli 2009, 61-3.

9 On Theodosius of Alexandria, see Robins 1993, 111-23; Dickey 2007, 83-4.

10 Ov. *Tr.* 5.10.37.

Through a variety of approaches – archaeological, historical and anthropological – the authors of this volume have unveiled the complexities of mobility and integration in a land that has always been a meeting point of cultures, a crossroads where foreignness was not an exception but an essential feature of the island's very nature. The individual case studies presented here underscore the fluidity of identity, the negotiations of belonging and the resilience of individuals and communities in adapting to new environments. They also demonstrate the importance of material culture and primary sources in reconstructing the experiences of people who moved through or settled on the island. As this book comes to a close, it is clear that the study of non-native individuals and communities in Cyprus is far from complete. There remains much to explore in the archives, in the field and in comparative frameworks that place Cyprus in dialogue with other regions of the Mediterranean and beyond.

A Land for Strangers opens the way to further inquiry into how the island's history might contribute to broader discussions on the nature of foreignness and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. This volume is not only a scholarly contribution to the study of Cyprus but also a reminder that connectivity and insularity are not opposites, but interwoven dynamics that have jointly shaped Cypriot history. The island's perceived marginality has long coexisted with its role as a site of contact, exchange and entanglement, offering a valuable observatory from which to reconsider prevailing narratives of centre and periphery. I share with the other editors of this volume the sincere hope that its multifaceted perspectives will ignite future research and interdisciplinary collaboration on the experiences of strangers in lands that may feel strange – only until strangeness gives way to familiarity, thereby deepening our understanding of the complexities of movement and settlement, both within Cyprus and far beyond.

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