

Cypria: A Journey to the Heart of the Mediterranean

Alex Christofi

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The island of Cyprus is centered in Alex Christofi's eye-opening historical exposé *Cypria*.

Situated in the eastern corner of the Mediterranean, Cyprus is located at several crossroads: the European, Asian, and African tectonic plates come up against each other here; maritime trade routes brought ships from all over the Mediterranean for thousands of years; and different ethnic groups and cultures rub shoulders. Noting that Eastern and Western empires have come and gone in Cyprus's environs, the book endeavors to highlight Cyprus's underappreciated place in the history of human civilization. Thus, its pages go back to the beginning, when inventions and developments credited to the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, and early Greeks emerged from Cyprus, including early Greek writing and the first Christian communities to develop outside of Judea.

Throughout, the book takes established Mediterranean history and turns it around, using Cyprus as the fulcrum. Some of its claims strain credulity, though, as when the Cypriots are credited with introducing well-digging to humanity. Further, its portrayals of Jewish people include some problematic tropes. The book is better anchored by Christofi's British-Cypriot background, enabling a simultaneous insider's-outsider's point-of-view. As the book approaches the present day, its narrative slows down and becomes more detailed, focusing on the manipulation of groups on the island by the unraveling British Empire, the buildup to the Greek military coup, and the Turkish invasion of 1974.

"Life's first great innovation was to make of itself an island," Christofi muses. "Humans still carry our own twist on the sea's recipe in our bloodstream." Honoring this, *Cypria* revisits the historical record, working to afford the island a place of honor in the story of the development of human civilization.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (July / August 2024)

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