Reconstructing the History of the Cypriot Maronites

Simone Paturel
Newcastle University

Abstract
The origin of the Maronite community of Cyprus has long been a matter of debate amongst scholars, from Jerome Dandini in the sixteenth century to the present day. In this paper, I will raise four key questions concerning the traditional picture of Cypriot Maronite history. Firstly, did the Maronite community arrive on Cyprus to escape religious persecution in their homeland? Secondly, can we clearly identify the four waves of migration that the traditional history assumes and links with episodes of persecution of Maronites in their homeland? Thirdly, was the Maronite community in Cyprus purely agricultural or was it also involved in trade. Finally, the population of Maronites in Cyprus is supposed to have fallen dramatically between the twelfth century and the present day: this paper will ask how we can explain this and whether or not it was the result of mass conversion. The paper concludes that there is little evidence for four waves of migration to Cyprus following religious persecution and that economic migration is a more likely explanation for the movement of population. Maronites in Lebanon were heavily involved in the silk trade and with Maronite communities present in the cities of Cyprus as well as rural villages, so there is no reason to exclude the possibility of a merchant community. Evidence for population decline is less certain than previously supposed and mass conversion is not required to explain it.
Keywords
Maronite History, Cyprus, Lebanon, Migration

Özet
Kıbrıs'taki Maronit topluluğu 16. yy. da Terami Dandini den günümüze akademisyenler arasında tartışma konusu olagelmiştir. Bu makalede geleneksel Kıbrıs Maronitlerin tarihini dört temel soru ile ele alınacaktır. Öncelikle Maronit cemaati Kıbrıs'a kendi ana vatanlarındaki dini baskıdan kaçmak için mi gelmişlerdir? İkincisi, geleneksel tarihinin varsaydığı gibi dört dalga halinde olan göçü Maronitlere kendi ülkelerinde yapılan işkencelerle bağlantı kurarak tanımlayabilir miyiz?Üçüncü olarak Kıbrıs'taki Maronitler yalnızca tarım topluluğu mudur, yoksa ticaretle de

ilgilenmişmidirler?Son olarak da Kıbrıs'taki Maronit cemaati nüfusu 20. yy dan günümüze kadar dramatik bir biçimde neden azalmıştır? Bu makale bunu nasıl açıklayabileceğimizi ve bunun kitlesel din değiştirme nedeni ile hiç ilgili olup olmadığını sorgulamaktadır. Sunumda nüfus hareketinin dört dalgalı göçün dini baskılar nedeniyle olduğuna dair çok az delil olduğu, asıl olarak ekonomik nedenlerden dolayı göçün gerçekleştiği kanaatine varılmaktadır. Lübnan'daki Maronitler ağırlıklı olarak ipek ticareti ile ilgilenmektedirler ve Kıbrıs'taki Maronitler de kırsalın yanında şehirde de yaşamaktadırlar. Bu durumda onların ticari bir topluluk olma ihtimallerini elemek için hiçbir neden bulunmamaktadır. Nüfusun azalmasının gerekçeleri ise öngörülenden daha belirsiz olup din değişikliği de bunu açıklayamamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maronitler, Kıbrıs, Lübnan, Göç

Introduction

The minority groups dotting the map of the Middle East and Mediterranean regions present the outside observer with distinctive socio-cultural profiles comprising factors of race, religion, language, patterns of internal organization, inherited traditions, etc., setting them apart from the national or administrative structures in which they are embedded. Reconstructing their individual histories on empirical lines can be an intriguing but difficult task for the researcher since the attainment of historical accuracy is usually hampered by unavailability of adequate records. Local traditions relating to community origins are often nothing more than re-explorations or re-creations of ethnicity whereby a group negotiates its identity with its host society. When available, written records too are often of dubious historical value, particularly in relation to communities with a religious dimension, since the portrayal of their past is not infrequently coloured by an ideological concern for orthodoxy—a charge often laid at the doors of Maronite historians. The community has allegedly been from its inception a group of monothelite persuasion and possibly "the historical result of that compromise between the Byzantines and the Syrian monophysite Christians".[1] Incidentally, identifying the specific sectarian group from which the Maronite Church evolved is a major problem since the term "Maronite" itself is apparently of a late Roman Catholic origin.[2] The meaning of the term "Syrian" which refers to them, but also to Jacobites, also needs clarification.

The present remarks on the Cypriot Maronite community will address four key questions relating to the early history of this group and to its migration to Cyprus from the adjacent mainland. Firstly, did the Maronite community migrate to Cyprus to escape religious persecution or for other reasons? If it was to flee religious persecution under Byzantine rule, or under Islamic rule, how can we explain the fact that these Maronites moved to live under the same conditions in Cyprus? Secondly, did the migration happen in four waves between the eighth and thirteenth centuries?[3] Thirdly, was the Maronite community in Cyprus purely agriculturalist, as has been assumed previously, or did it include merchants? Finally, how can we explain the apparent decline in population between the twelfth century and today and was it due to mass conversion?

This paper will conclude that the traditional view, as presented by Hourani (1998) and others, that the Maronite community was an agricultural one that fled Lebanon under threat of persecution, can be challenged. With limited historical evidence, a variety of interpretations can be made but the simplest is one of economic migration. The date of the initial settlement of Maronites in Cyprus is not clear, nor is there firm evidence of four distinct waves of migration. The extent of apparent decline in Maronite population is unknown and can be explained in several ways, not just through religious conversion. Above all, this paper proposes more historical research into the origin and development of the Maronite community in Cyprus.

Origins of the Maronites

The quest for a Maronite identity has always been the focus of the Maronite community in Lebanon. However, it is important to note that the lack of historiography has played a major role in the confusion surrounding the origin and development of the community. It was not until the seventeen century that Duwayhi, "the father of the Maronite history", attempted a critical history. Most previous historians lack coherence and continuity.[4]

There are many theories regarding the origin of the Maronites, which itself poses a problem of identity. Some scholars argue that the Maronites derive their name from Saint Maron, an anchorite monk who lived from the fourth to the fifth century in Kefar-Nabo in Syria Secunda.[5] Others, such as the eleventh century Maronite writer Toum, bishop of Kfartab in

his *Ten Treatises*, attributed the name to the Syriac term Maran, which means "our Lord Jesus Christ".[6] Bishop Yusef Al–Dibs argues that the Maronites are the descendants of the Mardaites, meaning rebels, who only emerged as a religious group in the seventh century, when accepting Monotheism and rebelling against the Byzantine state.[7] However, the identification of the Mardaites with the Maronites remains controversial. The historian Theophanes first mentioned the group as attacking Lebanon and latter harassing Arabs.[8] Mark Whittow suggests that origins of the Mardaites are unclear and points out that they have been linked to several groups in Syria and Lebanon.[9] Whittow also finds evidence that the Mardaites later appeared in Greece and Southern Asia Minor and were responsible for providing marines for the Byzantine navy (Whittow 1996, 187). The Reverend Boutros Dau argued that at the beginning of the eighth-century the military organisation of the Maronites was called "Al-Marada" by Byzantine and Arab historians (Dau 1984, 337),[10] hinting at a link to the Mardaites. However, the theory remains very controversial, as historian Matti Mousa makes clear (Moosa 1969). It seems more likely that the Maronite appellation is only a religious affiliation and not an ethnic one (Dau 1984, 9), and that there is no connection between the Mardaites and the Maronites.

Hitti suggests that that the Maronites were an offshoot of the Syriac speaking (Suryani) church.[11] The two other offshoots were the east and west Syrian communions. The eastern Syrian group later became known as the Nestorians after Nestorius of Cicilia, patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431.

A further possibility for the origin of the Maronites is that they were originally followers of John, abbot of a monastery named Marun and located in the vicinity of Hama (Moosa 1969, 37). This John Marun, who is believed to have died around 707, may or may not have been connected with the earlier Saint Maron. It is also unclear whether or not the monastery from which his name derives had any link with the Saint either (Moosa 1969, 35, 37). However, as Moosa (1969, 13) points out, many writers have identified John Maron as the first Maronite patriarch. The origin of the Maronites remains, therefore, a matter of significant historical debate.

Founder myth or reality and Early Migration to Cyprus?

The Maronite Church believes that Saint Maron was the founder of their community.[12] The first identification of a religious leader called Maron comes from a letter of Saint John Chrysostom dated to 405-7 AD:

> To Maron, the Monk Priest: We are bound to you by love and interior disposition, and see you here before us as if you were actually present....[13]

Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus also attested the existence of Maron, ascetic Syrian monk.[14] Theodoret wrote slightly later, in the mid fifth century and while he probably never met Maron he seems to have been familiar with some of Maron's followers such as Jacob and Limnaios (Theodoret ch. 21, 22). Many have speculated as to where Saint Maron lived. Bishop Dib argued that he lived on the top of a mountain near Apamea in Syria Secunda (Dib 1971, 3). After his death, Theodoret suggests a sacred enclosure was built above his tomb (Theodoret 16.4) and Dib suggests that a monastery was erected nearby (Dib 1971, 5).

Maronite tradition holds that 350 monks and followers of St. Maron were murdered on the orders of the monophysite bishop Severus of Antioch in 517 and their martyrdom is honoured by a festival held on the 31st July each year (Moosa 1986, 44). During the incident the Monophysites destroyed churches and monasteries in Syria, resulting in the death of 350 monks, which in turn led the emperor Justinian to publish an edict on August 6, 536, condemning the perpetrators to severe punishment (Moosa 1986, 63). However, we have problems identifying these monks; were they Maronites and what was the reason for their murder? We have a letter, addressed to the Synod of 518, by the monks and abbots of Apamea complaining about the incident, and a letter sent by Pope Hormisda to the bishops of Syria Secunda, which we are led to believe was in response to the original letter. However, we still lack strong historical evidence to support this assumption (Moosa 1986, 49). The importance of the assertion identifying the murdered monks as Maronites lies in two key points; firstly by associating the incident with the followers of Maron, continuity can be implied between St. Maron and the first Maronite Patriarch, John Maron in the early 8th century and secondly it establishes that the Maronites were originally Chalcedonian

and this adds weight to a claim that the Maronites never strayed from orthodoxy throughout their history (Labourt 1910). However, as Moosa (1986, 31) suggests there is no strong evidence to assert a direct link between the monk Maron and the later Maronite Church. Furthermore, evidence for the massacre of monks in 517 is itself weak (Moosa 1986, 63). The claim to continuous orthodoxy can also be challenged and Labourt (1910) argues that the Maronites adopted the Monothelite doctrine during the seventh century and continued to do so even after it was condemned by the third council of Constantinople in 681.

The traditional history of the Maronites suggests four phases of migration to Cyprus from Lebanon, between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries. The first migration seems to have taken place in the late seventh century, simultaneously with the Maronite migration from Lebanon to Syria. The real causes of this population movement are unclear. Some scholars, such as nineteenth century historian Mas Latrie, ascribed an early date to the settlement of the Maronites in Cyprus, around 686. When considering the departure of the Mardaites from Mount Lebanon under Justinian II, he wrote that

> all the geographical and historical considerations, seem to point out that an important branch of the nation was established in Cyprus a long time before the crusades… around the seventh century in the time of Justinian the second…. Some Maronite families again had to seek shelter in Cyprus in the centuries following, when Syria was being ransacked by the Arabs and the Turks.[15]

The difficulty lies in linking the movement of the Mardaites to the migration of Maronites to Cyprus, there is very little evidence to confirm or contradict an early migration hypothesis.

Reverend Dau argues that the cause of this first migration is exaggerated. The population movement is attributed to religious persecutions caused by Islamic conquest, or to ill-treatment by the Jacobites. Dau considers that some might have emigrated for these reasons, but others for economic ones (Dau 1984, 192), which is probably a more plausible and less dramatic explanation. He argued that the Muslim-Christian relationship preceding the crusades was rather good, with many Caliphs visiting Maronite monasteries. Some of them were even buried in Maronite monasteries such as Umar- Ben- Abdl-al-Aziz,

who was buried in the convent of St. Maron near Ma'arret-al-Na'aman and Hisham in Al-Resafa. Maronite convents were centres of art and science and not hostile places, and Reverend Dau argued that the Monophysite persecution of the Maronites was refuted by many historians such as the Jacobite Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch (818-45 AD) and Michael the Syrian, another Jacobite historian and patriarch. While there is evidence of violence against Maronite monks in 516-17 AD by the Monophysites, we cannot therefore conclude that this led to a mass migration from Syria to Lebanon and beyond (Dau 1984, 193; Dib 1971, 5).

Turning now to the impact of the Islamic invasions, again, we might ask ourselves an important question as to why the Maronites would flee the Islamic conquest in Syria to find themselves under Islamic rule in Cyprus. We know that in the 650s, the Orthodox inhabitants of Cyprus were scattered and removed to other parts of the empire.: as Judith Herrin argues in her book, *The Formation of Christendom*, 'those who could afford to leave the island did so to seek refuge in Africa, in Sicily and Italy, from both Monotheletism and the Arabs'.[16] In this period Monotheletism was enforced by the emperor Heraclius in Constantinople and had led to divisions in the east. While the Maronites of this period may have been Monothelitists themselves (Moosa 1969, 37-8) there is no suggestion that this led to a migration to Cyprus. The proposed flight from the Islamic conquest in Syria to Cyprus does not make sense either.

Hitti suggests a later date for the first migration to Cyprus. He suggests the colonists may have been originally refugees from the Abbasid persecution, particularly in the ninth century under al Mutawakil, later receiving fresh immigrants in the crusading period (Hitti 2002, 353, 24-25).[17]

We therefore can conclude that the evidence of an early migration of the Maronites from Syria to Cyprus on the grounds of religious persecution is unclear. The original date of the settlement is unknown and it is impossible to link it directly to any specific persecution event.

The Later Migrations

The second migration is believed to have taken place around the year 938, following the burning of St. Maron's monastery in the mid tenth century and the transfer of the patriarchal residence to Lebanon, although we have no evidence of the existence of a recognised denomination in Syria at the

time (Dib 1971, 7; Moosa 1986, 100). This event was attested by Al Massoudi, who reported that it "was destroyed as well as the cells which surrounded it, due to repeated incursions by the Arabs, and the violence by the Sultan" (Dib 1971, 7). However, we should not automatically conclude that these events are linked to a second migration. How can we explain the fact that not all the Maronites left? We know that Maronites migrated to many other countries, such as modern Iraq and Turkey, and prospered; they even prospered in different parts of Syria (Dau 1984, 194). For example, traveller reports suggest the existence of a Maronite community in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Takrit and other places between the Tigris and Euphrates (Hitti 1962, 252-53).

A third proposed migration to Cyprus took place around the twelfth century, under the auspices of Guy de Lusignan. After losing the Latin states in the Levant, he bought Cyprus in 1192 from Richard the Lionheart who had conquered it the previous year.[18] This allowed Christians from Syria to seek refuge from Moslem persecution. Hitti suggests that Maronites migrated to Cyprus following the capture of Beirut by Salah El Din and the destruction of the Maronite strongholds of Bsharri, Ihdin and Hadath al Jubbah (Hitti 1962, 325, 623). Again, however, there is limited evidence to support this hypothesis. However, it is clear that Christians found it difficult to obtain landed property under Islamic rule. Migration to Cyprus to find agricultural land under the Christian rule of the Latins is an attractive alternative proposition.

We can demonstrate the existence of a Maronite monastery built in Cyprus in the twelfth century, that of Saint John of Kouzband. A hand written Syriac manuscript from the Vatican archive confirms this:

> I, the humble Sema'an, monk by name, wrote these lines in this book, before our Blessed Father Boutros, Patriarch of the Maronites, who resides in the Monastery of Our Lady in Mayfouq in the valley of Ilige in the land of Batroun when he gave me power to preside over the Monastery of Saint John of Kouzband in the Island of Cyprus during the epoch of the monks who were living in the Monastery of Mar John. (G. Hourani 1998, 3)

Several other later documents from the Vatican archive also confirm several appointments to the same monastery (G. Hourani 1998, 4-5). St. Neophytus himself came to visit the Monastery in 1152.[19] The monastery

was close to the Greek monastery of St. John of Koutsovendis,[20] still extant today, although largely rebuilt in the 1950s (Nikolaou-Konnari and Schabel 2005, 166). The remains of two churches believed to be Maronite are visible close to the village of Koutsovendis.[21] The Maronite monastery was seized by the Greek Church causing the Maronite Patriarch al Hadthy to write a letter of complaint to Prince Albertos in Italy in 1518.[22] The village of Koutsovendis is believed to have originally been Maronite and Maronites still lived in the neighbouring village of Vouno in 1939 (Bradswell).

A final migration has been proposed following the defeat of the Crusaders in Tripoli and the Holy Land at the end of the thirteenth century (Dib 1971, 65, 77). Again, there is little evidence to link the event to the arrival of Maronites in Cyprus. Nevertheless, there is circumstantial evidence for migration to Cyprus after 1291. A 1322 rubric of a 1222 document that did not mention Maronites, includes them, suggesting they had now become important.[23] They were also represented by a bishop, George, at the council of Nicosia in 1340 (Nikolaou-Konnari and Schabel 2005, 166).

With limited and fragmentary historical information, linguistic evidence is important to the understanding the migration of the Maronite community to Cyprus. The vernacular spoken by the Cypriote Maronites bears a close relation to the vernaculars of Southeast Anatolia and Northern Syria.[24] What is particularly significant is that the Maronites of Cyprus do not speak a Lebanese dialect.[25] This suggests that migration may have come directly from Northern Syria or Southeastern Anatolia or that at the very least there were very significant contacts between these regions and Cyprus. The Arabic dialect of Cyprus is archaic in some respects, reflecting a significant component of Aramaic. This trait is unknown in other modern Arabic vernaculars suggesting that the separation of the Maronite group on Cyprus was early (Borg 2007). Hitti (1962, 252-3) also reports that the villagers at Kormakiti have preserved a mixed Syriac-Arabic dialect of the variety spoken in twelfth century Lebanon, although Borg's recent studies suggest Lebanon was not the origin of their language.

What is clear from this discussion is that the precise dates of the Maronite's migration to Cyprus are unknown. However, by the end of the twelfth century they were a significant group amongst the population of the Island. The reasons behind the migrations are not clear, yet we have

little evidence to support the hypothesis of four distinct episodes caused by specific incidents of persecution in Lebanon.

An Agricultural Maronite Community?

The remaining Maronite villages in Cyprus such as Kormakiti are in rural, mountainous locations and many of the now lost Maronite villages were clustered in the same region. However, the image of a mountain-based community of Maronites seeking refuge from persecution, as argued by Dib (1971, 65), may not be entirely correct. We should note that villages like Kormakiti are situated on the edge of the plain of Cyprus. While villages may have been sited for defensive reasons, simpler explanations are also possible. A local tale from Kormakiti tells of the re-foundation of the village at its present location. The first village was located some distance down the slope where a small church can still be seen today. While searching for a lost cow, a local farmer discovered a source of water within what was then wooded uplands. The existing village was suffering from drought at the time and so swiftly moved up the hill to be reconstructed close to the new spring.[26]

A Maronite community was also present in Medieval Famagusta, then a cosmopolitan trading port. The church of St. Anne in Famagusta has been identified as Maronite and is marked as *Maronit Klisse* on modern maps, however, this remains controversial. St. Anne's lies within the Syrian district of the walled city of Famagusta and close to the Nestorian church. The church is also only and a few hundred meters from the Carmelite and Armenian churches. The first clear identification of the church of St. Anne as Maronite derives from an Ottoman document of the late sixteenth century. However, there was also a Benedictine monastery of St. Anne in Famagusta (Schabel 2007) and there remains the possibility of confusion. The church contains Latin inscriptions, which has cast doubt on the identification of the church as Maronite. However, the church also contains Greek inscriptions. Maronite icons held by the Maronite diocese of Cyprus suggest that a mixture of inscriptions in Greek, Latin and Aramaic was the norm. The church is mostly whitewashed but what frescoes remain are of Italio-Byzantine or Byzantine in style.[27] Further research work on the church is needed to confirm it as belonging to the Maronite faith but at present it remains largely inaccessible. Albert Hourani argues that

> Emigration was not a simple process as it may appear at first sight to be. Young men did not go spontaneously, without preparation and by simple individual choice, down to the harbour and board a ship. Emigration involved organisations and decisions of various kinds.[28] (A. Hourani and Shehadi 1992, 7)

We may observe that when Lusignan brought locals from the Latin East, generally these tended to be scribes, artisans and craftsmen who arrived for economic or strategic reasons. One would expect that these people would settle in cities rather than rural locations. Lusignan was also accompanied by Syrian nobles who in all likelihood would have brought their retainers and household with them.

However, there is some circumstantial evidence that the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Maronite community may have been rural in character, as there seems to be no papal concern for the group (Schabel 2007). Further work is needed in this area.

As for the Maronites in the Levant, we know already that, in Syria, they were scattered everywhere, even in Aleppo. We have evidence that, even in the thirteenth century, they were not restricted to the Orontes valley (Dau 1984, 191). The Maronite community in Lebanon flourished as a result of the silk trade and, as a consequence, Beirut became the centre of silk export. Although remaining concentrated in the mountains, Maronites moved from northern Lebanon to settle in the south, and the Chouf (A. Hourani and Shehadi 1992, 4).

Given the trade routes between Cyprus and the Near East and the role of Maronites in the silk trade, we should expect that the community of Maronites in Cyprus would have included merchants. Unfortunately there is no direct evidence for this. However, there are numerous extant notarial acts covering the fourteenth century by the Genoese notary Sambuceto.[29] These are in Latin and primarily concern Genoese merchants, their wills, trades, and commercial activities. These documents, which survive largely by chance, do contain Arabic names and further investigation may provide evidence of Cypriote Maronites involved in trade.

Linguistic evidence can also provide evidence for the character of the Maronite Community on Cyprus. Jennings noted that Cypriot merchants regularly travelled in the eastern Mediterranean including, significantly, to Anatolia and Aleppo (Jennings 1993, 334), where the language of the Cypriote Maronites has its closest links. Borg argues, however, that the

Maronite community in Cyprus was agricultural on linguistic grounds, as Cypriot Arabic retained Aramaic words for farming implements such as the plough (Borg 2004, 39). Blau suggested that the transformation from Aramaic to Arabic amongst the Jews of Babylon was linked to their urbanisation.[30] The Maronite settlement at Kormakiti is clearly agricultural in character, and we should not find the retention of Aramaic words associated with farming surprising in this context. There is clearly an element of continuity with pre-Arab civilisation (Borg 2007).

It is still possible that the Maronite settlements in Cyprus did have business interests and, significantly, in the silk trade; Women from the Maronite community can still describe the weaving of silk cloth (Borg 2007). Even with an agricultural community at Kormakiti and other rural locations, Maronite trading groups may have been present in ports such as Famagusta. Whilst we have no firm evidence of Maronite involvement in trade, other eastern Christian groups were and Nestorian merchants were present in Cyprus in the fourteenth century.[31]

We should therefore be confident in challenging the notion that the Maronite community in Cyprus was a purely agricultural one that fled Lebanon under fear of persecution. The Maronite community in Lebanon was a mixed one with agriculturalists and successful silk traders. Given the historically close trading links between Cyprus and the Levant, we should have no reason to believe that the Maronite community in Cyprus was very different.

Population Decline?

Hackett believes that the Maronites were the largest Christian community in Cyprus after the Greeks, with a population of 180,000 in 1249. However, this number seems exaggerated and a more realistic figure for the Lusignan dynasty would be a population of 7000-8000 in thirty villages. This number then decreased, with 4000 in nineteen villages, recorded in 1596. Following his visit to Cyprus in 1569, Lusignan reported the existence of locusts in the island, migrating from Syria. The Dominican Angelo Calepio of Cyprus wrote in 1572, "Cyprus was scourged for many years with such swarms of locusts that they ate even stems of trees"[32] (Jennings 1993, 173). Mas Latrie counted 1200 to 1300 inhabiting five to six villages in the mid nineteenth century, while twenty years ago they were 160-170 families, of which 150 possessed four villages with a church and a priest appointed to each village. These

villages were called Kormakiti, Kapasia, Asomatos, and Hagia Marina, with one village shared with the Turks called Kampyli. Mas Latrie added that a further eighty Maronites lived in Nicosia, with four hundred at Larnaca, and that a priest and few others resided in Limassol.[33] Today the Maronite community of Cyprus numbers around 6000.[34]

What happened to the Maronite population from the twelfth century onwards? If we take the view of Hackett, with a very large Maronite community present in Cyprus in the thirteenth century, then we need to explain a large fall in population. However, this seems unlikely and if one adopts a figure of 7-8000 in the thirteenth century, the picture is one of gradual decline and then slow recovery. Even this, though, is subject to errors in the estimates produced by various visitors to Cyprus such as Dandini. For example, Dandini did not visit all of the Maronite villages and relied on secondary testimony from Italians and Greeks (Jennings 1993, 14-15).[35] The identification of Dandini's 19 villages remains problematic, deriving from the imperfect translation of Dandini's work into English by the historian C. D. Cobham.[36] Dandini named the villages as Metoschi, Fludi, Santa Marina, Asomatos, Gambili, Karpasia, Kormakitis, Trimitia, Casapisani, Vono, Cibo, Ieri, Crusicida, Cesalauriso, Sotto Kruscida, Attalu, Cleipirio, Piscopia and Gastria (Dandini 1656, 23). What is clear is the sharp decline in the number of villages and the concentration of the Maronite community, particularly in the village of Kormakiti.

How can we explain this "decline" in population? Given the lack of historical sources, it is open to speculation, a temptation that has proved too strong for some historians. It could be that the population declined due to natural causes such as plague, or famine caused by locusts between 1610 and 1628, or even the earthquake in 1556 (Jennings 1993, 179). Guita Hourani explains this fact by the arrival of epidemics and the raids of the Muslims from Egypt, which caused much damage to the population of the island during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (G. Hourani 1998, 6).[37] Hourani, however, is inaccurate, as raids from Egypt stopped earlier in the fifteenth century than she reports.

Guita Hourani also argues that there is evidence of ill-treatment by the Latins (G. Hourani 1998, 7); we have a letter, sent by the Maronite Patriarch Sham'oun al Hadthy to Pope Leo X, complaining about the confiscation of the Saint Maronite Church and its property by the Latin Bishop of Nicosia in 1514, while Cyprus was still under Venetian rule

(Assamarani 1979, 26-29). This preceded by four years a similar complaint about the confiscation of the monastery of St. Chrystosomos by the Greek Orthodox church. The circumstances of the seizures need to be considered carefully and need not reflect a general persecution of the Maronites. Latin churches were also seized if they became run down, for example (Schabel 2007). There is in fact little evidence of mistreatment of the Maronites by Latins during their period of rule, despite Hourani's claims to the contrary (G. Hourani 1998, 4). Her supposition that the Venetians imposed a feudal system and "exorbitant taxes" is also incorrect; the feudal system was introduced by the Lusignans 300 years previously (G. Hourani 1998, 4; Schabel 2007). Finally Hourani's suggestion that the worst rule of the Venetian period was by Jacques le Bâtard is undermined fatally by the fact that he was in fact a Lusignan king of Cyprus who died in 1473, some sixteen years before the arrival of the Venetians (Schabel 2007).

The Christians found themselves in difficult positions under the Ottomans. We do not have any record of letters exchanged between Rome and the Maronite Patriarch in the mainland, as the danger of the crusades was still present. We have documentary evidence showing a high level of conversion of Christians to Islam in Cyprus; in 1593-1595, the converts reached 31% of adult males (Jennings 1993, 139). Jennings argues that conversion to Islam was an easy means to obtain divorce for both men and women. Conversion to Islam was very popular among the Latin Christian community.[38] However, we do not know if there were any Maronites among these converts and in a similar political situation in contemporary Lebanon, the Maronite community did not convert. Some conversions of the Maronite community undoubted did take place to Greek Orthodoxy and Islam.[39] We have also the accounts of Father Jerome Dandini who reported the presence of converts; he reassessed the condition of the local Maronites and observed that the Muslims were renegades

> who turn Mahometans, to render their lives more easy and supportable, so that it seems an easy task to recover this isle…. For the renegades could no sooner see the Christian soldiers, but they would throw off their turbans, and put on hats instead, and turn their arms against the Turks (Jennings 1993, 143).

As noted above Dandini named nineteen villages left in Cyprus in 1596, and observed that many had left or apostatized, thus he recommended that a bishop should be appointed to this community. In 1598, Father Moise Anaisi was sent to Cyprus to serve until 1614 (Dandini 1656, 23). There have also been some suggestions that some amongst the Maronite community became the so-called Linobambaci, or Christians who adopted some elements of Islam.[40] These "converts" were concentrated in the Louroujina area of Nicosia. They retained some Christian beliefs such as baptism but adopted Islamic practices such as circumcision. Nevertheless, we should recall that the decline in the number of Cypriote Maronites was gradual at worst and so mass conversions are not needed to explain a loss in population.

Pilgrim accounts, from visits to Cyprus during fifteen century, describe desolation and unhealthy climate, and assert that the decline of the villages was worse than that of the towns; after the Ottoman conquest the populations of towns dropped considerably (Jennings 1993, 178-9). The Venetian Church was very concerned about the decreasing size of the population and tried to encourage new settlements, and the Ottomans did the same in the first decades of their rule (Jennings 1993, 202).

The evidence for population decline amongst the Maronites of Cyprus is weak. At worst there was a decline from a population of 7-8000 in the thirteenth century to 12-1300 in the nineteenth century, yet even these figures are heavily reliant on unreliable visitor accounts like that of Dandini. We have some evidence for general population decline in Cyprus, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which may explain a gradual fall in Maronite numbers. There is evidence for conversion to Islam amongst the general Christian population in Cyprus. However, under a similar political situation in Ottoman Lebanon conversion was not significant, so we have no reason to believe that the Cypriot Maronite community was any different. The biggest change lies in the number of villages with a Maronite community becoming more concentrated through time.

Conclusion

In his book *Taboos and the Perils of the Soul*, the Scottish social anthropologist, Sir James George Frazer, stated that "After all what we call truth is only the hypothesis which is found to work best".[41] This paper has attempted to provide another aspect of Maronite history, and try

to understand the real motivations behind and timing of their migration to Cyprus. In my opinion, the traditional picture of a Maronite agricultural community repeatedly fleeing religious persecution is flawed. The evidence for four distinct migrations prompted by specific episodes of persecution is very weak. A simpler explanation is one of economic migrants, whether traders or agriculturalists looking for land, in an eastern Mediterranean world that was well connected by trade routes. Maronite communities like Kormakiti were agricultural, but Maronites were also present in cities like Famagusta and Nicosia suggesting at least some merchants were numbered amongst them. The evidence for population decline relies heavily on uncertain estimates by various visitors to Cyprus. A decline in the number of villages is clear, however. The image of population decline through conversion and persecution can also be challenged. The evidence for persecution by Latins and Greeks, as presented by Hourani for example, is poor. While there is evidence of conversion in the Christian population of Cyprus as a whole, the extent of conversion of Maronites is not clear and we should recall the cohesiveness of the Maronite community in Lebanon. Further investigation of these claims is required. Opportunities to investigate the churches of Nicosia and Famagusta present themselves to us. Ultimately, what is touching is that the Maronites of Cyprus kept their language and rite, survived epidemics, famine, and persecution and stood proud for generations.

Bibliography

al-Dibs, Yusef (1871), Ruh al-Rudud fi Tafnid Zam al-Khuri Yusuf Dawud (Beirut: al-Umumiyya Press).

Assamarani (1979), Ph. Al Mawarinat fi Jazirat Koubros (Beirut).

Balard, Michel (ed.) *Notai genovesi in Oltremare: Atti rogati a Cipro da Lamberto di Sambuceto (11 ottobre 1296-23 giugno 1299)* (Genoa: Istituto di Medievistica, Universita di Genova, 1983).

Balard, Michel (ed.) *Notai genovesi in Oltremare: Atti rogati a Cipro. Lamberto di Sambuceto (31 marzo 1304-19 luglio 1310)* (Genoa: Istituto di Medievistica, Universita di Genova, 1984).

Blau, Joshua (1965), The emergence and linguistic background of Judaeo-Arabic : a study of the origins of Middle Arabic (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Borg, Alexander (2004), A comparative glossary of Cypriot Maronite Arabic (Arabic-English) : with an introductory essay (Boston, MA: Brill)

Bradswell, Monica (1939), 'A Visit to Some of the Maronite Villages of Cyprus', Eastern Churches Quarterly, 3, 304-08.

Chrysostom, John (1993), 'Letter to Maron', in Shafiq Abouzayd (ed.), *Ihidayutha: A Study of the Life of Singleness in the Syrian Orient : From Ignatius of Antioch to Chalcedon 451 A.D.* (Oxford: ARAM Society).

Cirilli, J. M. (1898), Les Maronites de Chypre (Lille: Don Bosco).

Cobham, Claude Delaval (1895), Excerpta Cypria, trans. C. D. Cobham (Nicosia: H. E. Clarke).

Dandini, Girolamo (1656), Missione apostolica al Patriarca, e Maroniti del Monte Libano del P. Girolamo Dandini ... e sua pellegrinazione a Gierusalemme. (Neri: Cesena).

Dau, Butros (1984), History of the Maronites : religious, cultural, and political (Lebanon: B. Dau).

Dib, Reverend Pierre (1971), History Of The Maronite Church (Detroit: Maronite Apostolic Exarchate).

Edbury, P. W. (1991), The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Enlart, Camille and Hunt, David (1987), Gothic art and the Renaissance in Cyprus (London: Trigraph in association with the A.G. Leventis Foundation).

Frazer, James George Sir (2002), Taboo and the perils of the soul (The Palgrave Archive edition of The golden bough ; v. 5; Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Glassé, Cyril (2001), The concise encyclopedia of Islam (London: Stacey International).

Hackett, John and Papaioannou, Charilaos I. (1923), A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus.

Herrin, Judith (1989), The formation of Christendom (London: Fontana).

Hill, George Francis Sir (1940), A History of Cyprus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Hitti, Philip Khuri (1962), Lebanon in History (Second edn.; London: Macmillan).

--- (2002), History of the Arabs : from the earliest times to the present (10th edn.; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Hourani, Albert and Shehadi, Nadim (1992), The Lebanese in the world : a century of emigration (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris).

Hourani, Guita (1998), 'A Reading in the History of the Maronites of Cyprus From the Eighth Century to the Beginning of British Rule', Journal of Maronite Studies. <http://www.mari.org/JMS/july98/A_Reading_in_the_History.htm>, accessed 24.04.2007.

Jennings, Ronald C. (1993), Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean world, 1571-1640 (New York ; London: New York University Press).

Mango, Cyril, Hawkins, E. J. W., and Boyd, Susan (1990), 'The Monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsovendis (Cyprus) and Its Wall Paintings. Part I: Description', Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 44, 63-94.

Mas Latrie, Jacques Marie Joseph Louis de (1861), Histoire de l'ile de Chypre sous le regne des Princes de la maison de Lusignan (Paris).

Michell, R. L. N. (1908), 'A Muslim-Christian Sect in Cyprus', The Nineteenth Century Journal, 63, 751-62.

Moosa, Matti (1969), 'The Relation of the Maronites of Lebanon to the Mardaites and Al-Jarajima', Speculum, 44 (4), 597-608.

--- (1986), The Maronites in history (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press).

Nikolaou-Konnari, Angel and Schabel, Christopher David (eds.) (2005), Cyprus : society and culture 1191-1374 (The medieval Mediterranean,, Leiden ; Boston: Brill).

Palmieri, A. (1905), Chypre, Dictionnaire de Théologie, Tome II (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané).

Salibi, Kamal S. (1980), Maronite historians of mediæval Lebanon (New York: AMS Press).

Varnava, Andrekos (2001), 'The Maronite Community of Cyprus: Past, Present and Future'. <http://www.syria-wide.com/The%20Maronite%20Community%20of%20Cyprus.htm>, accessed 24.04.2007.

Whittow, Mark (1996), The making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025 (New studies in medieval history; Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Endnotes

[1] Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (London: Stacey International, 2001), 294-96.

[2] Note, for instance, that the French term "Maronite" is first attested in 1576 (Petit Robert).

[3] Guita Hourani, "A Reading in the History of the Maronites of Cyprus from the Eighth Century to the Beginning of British Rule," *Journal of Maronite Studies* (1998), 2
<http://www.st-ilige.org/ARTICLES/MaronitesHistoryEN.pdf>

[4] Kamal S. Salibi, *Maronite Historians of Mediæval Lebanon* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 89.

[5] Pierre Dib, *History of the Maronite Church* (Detroit: Maronite Apostolic Exarchate, 1971), 3.

[6] Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 11.

[7] Yusef Al-Dibs, *Ruh Al-Rudud Fi Tafnid Zam Al-Khuri Yusuf Dawud* (Beirut: al-Umumiyya Press, 1871), 258-59.

[8] Matti Moosa, "The Relation of the Maronites of Lebanon to the Mardaites and Al-Jarajima," *Speculum* 44/4 (1969): 597-608 (597).

[9] Mark Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025* (New Studies in Medieval History; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 187.

[10] Butros Dau, *History of the Maronites: Religious, Cultural, and Political* (Lebanon: B. Dau, 1984), 337.

[11] Philip Khuri Hitti, *Lebanon in History*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1962), 252-53.

[12] J. Labourt, 'Maronites', *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09683c.htm>

[13] John Chrysostom, 'Letter to Maron', in Shafiq Abouzayd (ed.), *Ihidayutha: A Study of the Life of Singleness in the Syrian Orient : From Ignatius of Antioch to Chalcedon 451 A.D.* (Oxford: ARAM Society, 1993).

[14] Theodoret, "Histoire Des Moines De Syrie", in Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen (eds), *Sources Chrétiennes* 234 (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 1979), 16.1-4. [Not terribly clear what these numbers mean - p.14, paragraphs 1-4? Clarify.]

[15] Jacques Marie Joseph Louis De Mas Latrie, *Histoire De L'ile De Chypre Sous Le Regne Des Princes De La Maison De Lusignan* (Paris: L'Imprimerie Imperiale, 1861), 108-9.

[16] Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (London: Fontana, 1989), 251.

[17] Philip Khuri Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present* 10th edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 324-55.

[18] Angel Nikolaou-Konnari and Christopher David Schabel (eds.), *Cyprus: Society and Culture 1191-1374* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 1.

[19] Sir George Francis Hill, *A History of Cyprus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 305.

[20] Cyril Mango, E. J. W. Hawkins, and Susan Boyd, "The Monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsovendis (Cyprus) and Its Wall Paintings. Part I: Description," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 63-94.

[21] Monica Bradswell, "A Visit to Some of the Maronite Villages of Cyprus," *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 3 (1939): 304-8.

[22] Assamarani, *Ph. Al Mawarinat Fi Jazirat Koubros* (Beirut, 1979), 26-29.

[23] Christopher David Schabel, "Personal Communication," (Nicosia, 2007). [Location isn't needed, but full date is.]

[24] Alexander Borg, *A Comparative Glossary of Cypriot Maronite Arabic (Arabic-English): With an Introductory Essay* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), 9.

[25] Alexander Borg, "Personal Communication," (06/03/2007)

[26] Katine Basheins, "Personal Communication," (19/04/2007).

[27] Camille Enlart and David Hunt, *Gothic Art and the Renaissance in Cyprus* (London: Trigraph in association with the A.G. Leventis Foundation, 1987), 274.

[28] Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 1992), 7.

[29] Michel Balard (ed.) *Notai genovesi in Oltremare: Atti rogati a Cipro da Lamberto di Sambuceto (11 ottobre 1296-23 giugno 1299)* (Genoa: Istituto di Medievistica, Universita di Genova, 1983); Michel Balard (ed.) *Notai genovesi in Oltremare: Atti rogati a Cipro. Lamberto di Sambuceto (31 marzo 1304-19 luglio 1310)* (Genoa: Istituto di Medievistica, Universita di Genova, 1984).

[30] Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 20.

[31] P. W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 178.

[32] Claude Delaval Cobham, *Excerpta Cypria*, trans. C. D. Cobham (Nicosia: H. E. Clarke, 1895), 143.

[33] John Hackett and Charilaos I. Papaioannou, *A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus* trans. Charilaos I. Papaioannou, 3 vols (Athens and Peiraeus: Ἐν Ἀθήναις , 1923), 528.

[34] Antonis Haji Roussos, "The Maronite Community in Cyprus", Cyprus Maronites (Nicosia: The Maronite Community of Cyprus, 2008), 51. <http://www.maronitesofcyprus.com/upload/20080806/1218031838-06188.pdf>

[35] Girolamo Dandini, *Missione Apostolica Al Patriarca, E Maroniti Del Monte Libano Del P. Girolamo Dandini ... E Sua Pellegrinazione a Gierusalemme.* (Neri: Cesena, 1656), 19-20.

[36] Andrekos Varnava, "The Maronite Community of Cyprus: Past, Present and Future," *Al-Mashriq: A Quarterly Journal of Middle East Studies* 1:2 (2002), 45-70 (8).

[37] J. M. Cirilli, *Les Maronites De Chypre* (Lille: Don Bosco, 1898), 13.

[38] R. L. N. Michell, "A Muslim-Christian Sect in Cyprus," *The Nineteenth Century Journal* 63 (1908): 751-62 (752-753). Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600-1025* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996).

[39] G. Houri, "Personal Communication," (20/04/2007).

[40] A. Palmieri, *Chypre, Dictionnaire De Théologie, Tome Ii* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1905) .

[41] James George Sir Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).