

Bertram John Weston's Vision of Famagusta and the Creation of 'Cypriots'

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Bertram John Weston served as District Commissioner for Famagusta during the first years of the emergency in Cyprus in the 1950s. He shared with his contemporary Lawrence Durrell a deep devotion to the country in general and Famagusta in particular. He failed to fully appreciate the national aspirations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, and so his dream of creating a Switzerland in the Mediterranean (that under British leadership would be populated by Cypriots who would share a common vision) was fanciful to say the least. There were certainly two types of colonial administrators in Cyprus: those who didn't care to mingle with or understand the local population and culture – surely the largest group by far – and those who tried and failed. This can largely be attributed to a romantic misconception of ancient and medieval traditions that are so predominant in Famagusta. Especially intellectual colonial administrators often fell into that trap by creating an image of a modernized ancient Hellenic or medieval francophone Cyprus. Little was learned by the experience of Ronald Storrs, a philhellene who got his Government House burned down by Greek Cypriots. The case of Bertram John Weston exemplifies that the British did not understand that times had changed until it was too late.

This paper will examine Weston's vision of Famagusta, Famagustians, and Cyprus as he saw it. Based on his correspondence with John Reddaway and others it offers a unique insight into late colonial rule on the island.