

INTRODUCTION

'Travoys Arriving with Wounded at a Dressing Station at Smol, Macedonia, September 1916' by Sir Stanley Spencer is one of the most recognisable and striking paintings of the Great War. Based on what he witnessed while serving in the 68th Field Ambulance, Spencer painted it in 1919 after the British War Memorials Committee of the Ministry of Information commissioned him to paint something for a proposed, but never built, 'Hall of Remembrance'. The painting shows mule-drawn stretchers carrying wounded men to a dressing station, an old Eastern Orthodox Church, while animals and humans watch the life-saving efforts of the surgeons. The image recalls the depictions of the birth of Jesus Christ. For Spencer the wounded men on the stretchers represented a wounded Christ on the Cross and the work of the surgeons represented the Resurrection. He wrote, 'I meant it not a scene of horror but a scene of redemption.'¹

One would have thought that the scene was a sordid one ... but I felt there was grandeur ... all those wounded men were calm and at peace with everything, so the pain seemed a small thing with them. I felt there was a spiritual ascendancy over everything.²

Now it may or may not depict Cypriot muleteers, but the painting represents the service of all muleteers (as does his Sandham Memorial Chapel), irrespective of their ethnic/religious backgrounds, during the Great War, and not merely those in the image, or those who served in Macedonia. It also includes the animals that were worked to exhaustion during the war. Paintings have the ability to be inclusive. Yet most Cypriots and British today do not know that Cypriots even served in the Great War. They have been excluded from the story of the Great War in the broader context of the Allied victory and commemorations, and their service silenced from the Cypriot national consciousness. At the most basic level this book reconstructs the story of their contribution, transporting wounded men and various supplies to the front, across steep mountains, with dangerous ravines and in a climate that changed from one extreme to another. Simultaneously, this book also endeavours to include the role of mules in Salonica into the Great War. But this book seeks to do much more than merely 'fill the gap'.

The reader may ask, Who cares about a group of Cypriot mule drivers and a handful of interpreters in the British army serving in Macedonia and Constantinople during and immediately following the

SERVING THE EMPIRE IN THE GREAT WAR

Great War? The importance is not merely in that nobody has written about them. This should be important to Cypriots, who have a highly nationalistic view of their past that excludes 'the other' and condemns the 'occupier', and for the British in order to understand the contributions of their Empire in the Great War. The reader interested in military and/or imperial history should be interested in why the corps was created and what value it offered, as well as in the role of the mules. Those interested in military history should, however, also be aware of the social implications of war. Thus, given the strong enlistment rates, it is important to understand what this means for imperial identity and loyalty. It was a mixed Christian–Muslim corps largely made up of peasants and unskilled labourers. How could such a successful corps have existed as a mixed Christian–Muslim force given the violent post-Second World War history of the war-torn island? For that matter, how did the British, the targets of that violence, at least from 1955 to 1959, manage to recruit so many Cypriot men? This necessitates a focus on the socio-economic conditions of the men and the urban and rural divide in the island. The experience of the men while serving and as veterans, as well as that of their families, also necessitates a socio-economic awareness. Finally, the reader is returned to the beginning and why nobody has written about this before, to show how culturally this case has been silenced from the memory of Cypriots. After war, forgetting is just as important as remembering. In this case, political considerations are at the fore of this silence, as they will be if this story ever enters Cypriot national consciousness.

This book argues that Cypriot mules and mule drivers played a pivotal role in British logistics in Salonica and Constantinople, especially the former. The Cypriot colonial government passed laws to facilitate the procuring of mules and the enlistment of men, offering incentives to breeders and to the men. The law prohibiting the emigration of men of military age was a major facilitator of enlistment, since Cypriot men were looking to emigrate, while excellent wages, 12-month contracts, bonuses for re-signing, and an allotment scheme for their dependents, amongst other incentives, attracted an incredible 25% of the male population aged 18–35 to enlist (not including the many rejected). Although men enlisted from all parts of Cyprus and from all communities, most came from rural areas, and from peasant or labouring families. Ethnic distinctions played little role in enlisting. The few men who had any nationalist affiliations, to the broader Pan-Hellenic or Pan-Islamic identities, were not prevented from enlisting. Loyalty to the British Empire was strong, even if it must be understood alongside the primary motive – the significant financial and material rewards. Had all Cypriots wanted the British

INTRODUCTION

out of Cyprus would there have been such enthusiasm to enlist? The experiences of the men were on the whole positive; most made money and supported their families. Some, however, did not go so well. Many contracted venereal disease during their training in Famagusta, while others became ill during their service and died, and others became invalids. Still others misbehaved in a criminal way. Although clearly a subaltern group, they did speak up when they thought that the British had failed to implement any of their responsibilities, such as early on with the allotment scheme or when they insisted on their understanding of the 12-month contract to force them to serve longer. The British listened when it suited them, namely when recruitment was at risk. But they also reduced their own responsibilities to the muleteers and their families, such as in case of invalidity and death, which had devastating consequences for veterans and their families. The failure to care for veterans coupled with various social and political developments during the interwar years saw the story of the Cypriot Mule Corps silenced from Cypriot national memory.

A brief service history of the Cypriot mules and muleteers

Officially, the Cypriot Mule Corps was operational from summer 1916 until April 1920, when it was disbanded. First the vast majority of the men served in Macedonia and, indeed, the corps was officially known as the Macedonian Mule Corps. The base camp of the mules and muleteers was at Lembet Road.³ The personnel served in various units of the British army in Salonica. The reports on the strength of the forces and the letters of veterans to the Cypriot colonial government show which divisions and units they belonged to. In the XII Corps they were the 22nd and 26th Divisions and in the XVI Corps they were the 10th (Irish), 27th and 28th Divisions.

During the Great War a small number of muleteers and interpreters served in British units outside of Salonica. For example, Cypriots in British army units that left Salonica for Egypt went with them, such as Haris Panaou, from Rizokarpaso, who lost a leg in Alexandria.⁴

The Armistice at Mudros, signed on 30 October, resulted in the Allied (British, French and Italian) occupation of Constantinople. French troops entered the city on 12 November 1918, followed by British troops, including the Cypriot Mule Corps on the next day.⁵ The Mule Corps was based at Bostancı in Kadıköy, on the Asian side of the city.⁶

It is important to understand the nature of the work done by the muleteers and mules. Muleteers drove mules that carried arms, ammunition and medical and food supplies to the front and wounded

and dead soldiers back to camp, across the treacherous mountain terrain. Injuries, disease, death and misconduct, although not endemic, occurred. There is little information on the role of foremen, although they had 20 muleteers under their supervision, and even less on the 100 interpreters, who were based in each unit and at base camp.

Generally the Cypriot Mule Corps was a success for both those who formed it and those who served in it. Yet the focus of this book is not merely to explore positives. It is to provide a holistic portrait of the Corps, focusing on all the issues surrounding it, as well as broader imperial, colonial, military, social, economic, political and cultural lenses.

Sources and methodology

In 2010 I was in London undertaking research on the Legion d'Orient / Armenian Legion in the National Archives when I discovered the honour roll of the 'Macedonian' Mule Corps. Opening the file was a 'jaw-dropping' moment. Stunned by the number of names and the information, such as addresses and enlistment and discharge dates, I decided to write an article. But after realising that the Corps impacted upon almost the entire population of the island and that it was hardly 'Macedonian', but really Cypriot, leading to my renaming it 'Cypriot Mule Corps' (by which it was sometimes referred to in official documents), I decided to write a book. In Adelaide I began the slow, five-year process to reconstruct the story of the Cypriot Mule Corps and to understand its broader importance. This was no easy task since none of the men were alive nor, being mostly peasants and labourers, had they left any account, written or oral, like the diaries, scrapbooks and private letters left by many who served in the two Liverpool battalions (men who belonged to the middle class) studied by Helen McCartney.⁷ Meanwhile the existence of the Cypriot Mule Corps had been erased from the Cypriot national consciousness.

The first step was to consolidate the main source, the honour roll. I acquired an electronic excel copy and began the long process of correcting the names and the place names, and adding the missing names and dates of enlistment and discharge, since the original honour roll was incomplete. This took years. This process was helped when I discovered local files on the subject in the State Archives in Nicosia in 2012.⁸

This archive, rich for its (and the region's) Cypriot history, contains the correspondence and memoranda to and from the Cypriot colonial government as they were catalogued by the Chief (later Colonial) Secretary.⁹ I discovered several files on the Cypriot Mule Corps, which completed the story as regards its formation and administration (with

INTRODUCTION

Colonial and War Office files from the National Archives, UK) and opened a new line of enquiry on the experiences of the men during and after their service. These documents, usually complaints about outstanding pay, requests for welfare from those disabled, widows or destitute veterans, or applications from veterans for their medals, are the main primary sources containing the voices of the men who served and that of their families, even if in many cases others wrote for them.

A subsequent trip to the National Archives in the UK in 2014 to research the London Cypriot community during the interwar years afforded me the opportunity to access the War Office files. Although there was no official history produced, there were numerous diaries and memoranda that provided the day-to-day about the corps and policy debates that led to various decisions. This gave me something about the experiences of the men, but I wanted more.

The voices of the men from their graves being impossible, the next best thing was the project 'Europeana 1914–1918', a component of Europeana's broader programme to digitise European cultural heritage. Publicly announced in 2011 as 'Europeana Collections 1914–1918: Remembering the First World War', its goal was to digitise over 400,000 source items. Public online submissions were opened and roadshows were held inviting the public to bring physical artefacts or documents to be digitised, and to record stories connected to them. Fifty-one sessions were run across Europe until December 2013, with the Cypriot roadshow on 1–2 December 2012. The team in Cyprus also visited people's homes to scan and photograph items, and interview descendants.¹⁰ The benefits of this collection outweighed the problems, since these sources offered some voice for those who served, even if it is relayed by others. The main problem was that there was not one entry on a Turkish Cypriot muleteer; clearly, whether intended or not, this was the result of the division of the island and their continued exclusion from Cypriot history. This is a major concern, especially since the project is pan-European. Another problem was that the interviews were conducted by people who knew little about the history of Cyprus, especially on the Great War and the Cypriot Mule Corps. This resulted in errors and the material gathered not being as useful as it may have been, especially if the right questions had been asked.

A trip to Istanbul in 2012 was surprisingly fruitful. I found a memorial to fallen Cypriot muleteers who served in the Black Sea at the British cemetery at Hader Pasha, but it was the Ottoman archives, namely the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (Office of the Grand Vizier's Ottoman Archives) in Istanbul, which proved most useful. That I found anything here on the Cypriot muleteers was a complete surprise. The material, discussed mostly in Chapter 7, was from the Ottoman

Interior Ministry and was mainly police reports on the behaviour of Cypriot and other muleteers in Constantinople. It was illuminating to have the Ottoman perspective on the Cypriot muleteers, especially since there were no corresponding Greek sources from their service in Macedonia. Indeed the reader may wonder why no Greek archives were accessed. This was not for want of trying. Although no personal visit was made, many archives were contacted in writing and colleagues searched high and low, all to no avail. Perhaps no material exists because the muleteers were, unlike in Constantinople, not easily able to obtain leave to visit Salonica.

The book is built around nine chapters. The first two provide valuable and necessary historiographical, theoretical and historical context, and the rest discuss, in a chronological and thematic framework, the Cypriot Mule Corps from its formation through to the issues that veterans had even into the 1940s, and finally ending with how and why it has been forgotten from Cypriot and British memory. Chapter 2 provides the necessary historical context. It first explores Cypriot society from late Ottoman through to early British rule, until the Great War. This is necessary to understand why so many men enlisted in the Mule Corps. The next part covers the role of Cyprus during the Great War beyond the Mule Corps to show that the Cypriot contribution was much greater. It also explores the impact of the war on Cypriot socio-economic conditions, particularly of so many men serving abroad on the local economy and society. The next chapter delves into the formation of the Mule Corps. It explores questions such as why and how it was formed, why Cypriot mules and men were selected, and its administration and organisation. This leads into a discussion in Chapter 4 on why and how so many mules were procured and so many men enlisted. Were the men pushed or pulled? If pushed, what pushed them? If pulled, what pulled them? What were the recruiting strategies? To begin to answer these questions, it is important to know how many enlisted, from which parts of the island, from which religious groups and from what civil status. This analysis helps to prove that the Cypriot Mule Corps primarily attracted peasants and labourers, especially rural labourers.¹¹ The following chapter explores what threatened recruitment and how these threats were overcome. It looks at how Cypriots, as subalterns and within the 'liminal space', had a limited voice. Only when their voice threatened enlistment did the British listen, while the Cypriot government served as a tempering force between the men and the military. The sixth chapter reconstructs the treatment of the mules and the experiences of the men while on service and upon their immediate repatriation. What were conditions like for man and beast in Salonica and Constantinople?

INTRODUCTION

How well did the muleteers treat their mules? What were the experiences of the men close to the front? The chapter focuses on the health of the muleteers, especially venereal disease, which jeopardised the mule corps, and provides statistics on casualties, which were high given the British promises of safety. The next chapter explores the behaviour of the men, namely the incidence of desertion and crime, and how these were punished. Although the vast majority of the muleteers were valued and got along well, there were some who did not. Their stories provide valuable insights into the overall experience and British reactions. Chapter 8 continues with the experiences of the men, now as veterans seeking welfare or their papers and medals, and how families, especially widows, struggled. These 'orphaned widows' were left unprotected and vulnerable, yet received little, if any, compensation from the military authorities, and none from the colonial government. Disabled men were not treated any better, while many veterans fell on hard times and some were supported by the branch of the British Legion in Cyprus. Still others emigrated and found it necessary to seek proof of their service for employment and social inclusion. Nevertheless, most veterans were proud of their service, despite the rise of anti-colonialism. One of the more extraordinary aspects of this story is its absence from Cypriot national memory. The final chapter explores how the service of the muleteers never entered national consciousness, buried, first, under the hardships of the interwar years and then underneath opposed 'Greek' and 'Turkish' nationalist narratives of the island's history. This necessitates an understanding of Cypriot political history and the eventual splitting of the integrated peasant and labouring classes and their reintegration into the 'Greek-Christian' and 'Turkish-Muslim' ethnic groups. This and the British neglect to support and commemorate the veterans of the Cypriot Mule Corps combined to see its story never entering Cypriot national memory. The existence of the Cypriot Mule Corps was incompatible with the programme and desire for *enosis* of Greek Cypriot political elites of both the right and left, who eventually won the hearts and minds of the peasant and labouring classes after the Second World War. The erasure of the Cypriot Mule Corps from Cypriot national consciousness and memory shows how epic events in a country's history can be excluded from that consciousness and memory.

The archive-driven account is given a human face through individual stories of Cypriot muleteers and their families, and their mixed fortunes as part of the British Empire and its war efforts, in what Jay Winter would refer to as 'the braiding together of family history and national history'.¹² One can see the lives of the muleteers unfolding alongside the wider, more powerful, forces at play: the different

SERVING THE EMPIRE IN THE GREAT WAR

experiences of war service, life for families and veterans during the rise and suppression of nationalism and communism and the hardships of the Great Depression; and finally the Second World War. Ultimately this is the story of military service from a loyal mixed Christian-Muslim, primarily peasant and rural labouring, colonial society, which was controlled by the powerful British Empire and yet neglected by it after their service. Such a story opens the door for other studies of similar colonial groups that contributed to the British war effort during the Great War, even with few first-hand personal accounts.

Notes

- 1 Accessed from the website of the Imperial War Museum, <http://archive.iwm.org.uk/upload/package/95/collections/art/stanley-spencer.html> on 16 February 2015.
- 2 John B. Allcock, 'Stanley Spencer: An English Artist in Macedonia', *Macedonian Review*, 18(3), 233–42, 238; Also, *Art from the First World War*, Imperial War Museum, London, 2008.
- 3 Cypriot State Archives (SA1), SA1/722/1916/1, Sisman to Stevenson, 11 February 1918.
- 4 See the documents on Haris Panaou in SA1/978/1916 and SA1/607/1917. His story features in Chapter 8.
- 5 Nur Bilge Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation, 1918–1923*, Brill, Leiden, 1999.
- 6 See DH.EUM.AYS/36/17/1338.B.4.
- 7 Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- 8 The original hand-written list is in WO/405/1. After the war, typed lists were produced, see WO329/2357 and WO329/2358. Along with the various files in the State Archives (SA1) in Nicosia, I produced a consolidated list. It is from this list that the service numbers, next of kin and addresses of the muleteers have been sourced.
- 9 When Cyprus became a Crown Colony in 1925 the post of Chief Secretary was renamed Colonial Secretary, while the High Commissioner became a Governor.
- 10 Jamie Andrews, 'Digitisation and the First World War: Europeana Collections, 1914–1918', *The British Empire and the Great War: Colonial Societies / Cultural Responses*, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 19–22 February 2014.
- 11 Two articles were developed from Chapter 4. One appeared in *Itinerario* (2014) and the other is under review.
- 12 Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, 2.