

# INITIATIVES TO COLONISE CYPRUS WITH JEWS IN THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

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## ABSTRACT

For hundreds of years the Jewish community has been blamed for the crucifixion of Jesus and because of this has been despised and ostracised by the Christian world. The two most explicit examples of this can be seen in the fact that the Jews were exiled from Spain about 500 years ago and the fact that they were subjected to genocide during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

As the land which their Prophet had promised them, was at that time under Ottoman rule and because the Sultan refused to allow the Jews the right to settle there, the Jews who for around 1900 years had lived under this oppression in Europe, started to think about settling in areas close to their 'Promised Land'. After investigations in the area of the Eastern Mediterranean and because the British Administration acted sympathetically towards their cause, the island of Cyprus became a very attractive location to them and with the initiative of the associations they founded they began moves to form a Jewish colony on Cyprus.

**Key words:** Cyprus, Jews, Jewish colony on Cyprus, history

## 1. INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 20th century an initiative to found a Jewish settlement centre in Cyprus is made. All the financial funding for the settlement is met by the French philanthropist Maurice de Hirsch and the "Jewish Colonization Association (JCA)"

The attempts by the Jews to settle in Cyprus were short lived. This initiative was started by a few Jewish families who had recently moved to London from Russia in 1897 and had founded an association called "Ahavat Zion", Love of Zion. The aim of the association was to found new settlements areas and settle on Cyprus, which was only a days sea journey away from Israel which was then under Ottoman rule.

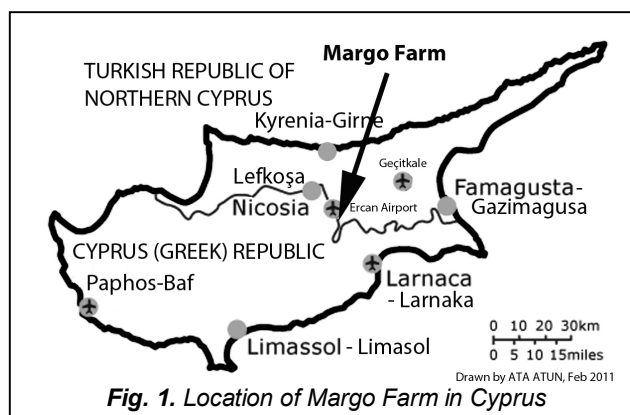
The aim of this document is to put this little known initiative on record and to give researchers basic information about this, to date little known issue.

## 2. THE JEWISH COLONISATION ON CYPRUS

Many members of the "Ahavat Zion" Love of Zion association are people who had managed farms in Russia. However more than planting and sowing and tending animals these people were more experts in collecting rent. Even so the members of the Association come to Cyprus, only a days sea journey away from the "Promised Lands" make explorations and decide to settle there. With this aim they approach the "Jewish Colonization Association" (JCA) to buy the 8,305 dönüm (11,110 hectare) Margo Farm. The JCA which believes that this move will serve the Jewish mission and fulfill the dream they have had for many years react positively to this request and give them the money required as credit. With this money, at the start of the 20th century, 15 families, members of the Association, come to Cyprus and buy the Margo Farm which is situated about 14 kms east of the British colonial capital Lefkoşa (Nicosia) and settle there.

The JCA builds houses and stables for these families, buys seeds for them to plant and cattle for breeding and supplies them with a school, Synagog an oven and a mill.

As the very hot and dry the weather of the Mesaoria (Mesarya) plain and the climate in Cyprus is not like that of west Europe, three of the families which settled return immediately. Another one of the reasons for this return are the Malaria spreading mosquitos as well as fact that there is no social life in their new poor village, made of adobe mud houses, or in the surrounding area.



**Fig. 1. Location of Margo Farm in Cyprus**

With the return of these three families the Jewish colony is reduced to twelve families and seven families, who can only endure this life of privation for two years also return two and a half years later, leaving only five families on the farm. With the dispersment of the Association members to different places, solidarity breaks down and the "Love of Zion" association is closed and becomes a thing of the past. As the credit had been given directly to the JCA, when the Association closes the JCA takes possession of the farm.

The new owner of the farm, the JCA, sends a farm manager from London to manage the farm. When he arrives the manager is shocked to find that these fifteen Jewish immigrant families, who had been sent to Cyprus a few years previously, did not know how to plough fields or raise animals and had in the two and a half years they had been on the island sold off almost all the supplies and animals provided by the JCA for their livelihood and for the development of livestock breeding.

### 3. SECOND ATTEMPT

The JCA is undaunted by this unsuccessful first settlement attempt. In an attempt to make the Colonisation attempt permanent, this time new settlers are chosen from the graduates of the Mikveh Yisrael School of Agriculture (Land School), situated on the outskirts of the town of Yafa in Israel.

As the climate is the same, the living conditions are similar and because there is a large terrain which can be farmed the newly graduated agriculturists accept with much pleasure the offer of the JCA and come to the Margo farm in order to settle.

Due to the boundless energy and non stop hard work of these agriculture educated new comers, the Margo farm improves in 1902. With the four Mikveh Yisrael Agriculture School graduates working hand in hand with the five families already on the Farm the goat herd doubles and the quality and yield of the produce significantly increases.

Due to the success achieved in such a short time the JCA becomes very hopeful and with the aim of increasing the numbers of the Jewish Colony on the island and increasing the number of Jewish settlements, finds more Jewish families from Europe and sends them to the island. After six years have passed, in 1908, despite the fact that many families who had settled had left, the Jewish families' number sixteen and inter marriages have started.

Those who had settled on the island previously and those who settled from Israel where malaria was rife were more immune to the illness and therefore the newcomers were adversely affected by malaria in all its stages.

When the tenth year of settlement is completed the number of Jewish Colonies on the island numbers three and the number of Jews reaches 189. The Jews founded colonies in three different places, Koukla (Köprü), Margo and Çömlek farms and undaunted were carrying on their struggle for life



**Fig. 2. House built by Jewish Settlers**

### 4. ACCEPTANCE OF FAILURE

In the 17th year of the Jewish settlement efforts in Cyprus, the JCA, with the statistics it has to hand and investigations it carries out decides that the Jewish farms on Cyprus do not have much of a future.

The adverse effects of uncontrollable malaria, hot weather, drought and lack of water added to the fact that there is no social life, makes life very difficult for the Jews who are used to an European culture and lifestyle.

Added to all this, the fact that Israel was so close was causing the Jews to experience spiritual negativity. The Jewish families who had arrived from Europe wanted to make one more day journey as soon as possible to the "Promised Land" at whatever cost, and this thought never left their mind for an instant.

The Jews who were willing to take the chance of living in any settlement in the Eastern Mediterranean, were unable to free themselves of the desire and dream to lead a better life and of sooner or later moving to Palestine (Israel), where Jewish settlements had started and were well established, and where Jewish culture had developed and economic life was continually improving.

The JCA once aware of this decides that it would be a better idea to pay off all its debts, sell the land, cattle, sheep and goats it possesses and end the settlements in Cyprus in an organised way and makes the necessary plans. However the breakout of World War I puts an end to these plans before they can be implemented. When the War ends in 1919 the number of Jews living on the Koukla (Köprü) Margo and Çömlek farms is slightly reduced to 169.

## 5. THE CLOSING OF THE FARM

As a first step towards ending the settlement program the JCA farm administrator representative is recalled to London in 1923 and the Jews who had come to Cyprus to settle are told that the JCA would no longer be aiding them financially or otherwise. After this announcement many Jewish families immigrate to Israel.

The Margo Farm is sold and the Çömlekci farm nearby is closed down. The remaining Jewish families continue their lives in the village of Koukla (Köprü). It can be seen from the last report of the JCA dated 1927 that 43 Jews remained in Kukla.

## 6. THE JEWISH CEMETERY

According to the records of the British Colonial Government, at the end of the 50s, because all Jewish immigrants had migrated to Israel there were no longer any Jews left on the island. From the gravestones of the Jewish cemetery we can see that the last person buried there died in July 1960.

According to records the children and grandchildren of the Jews who had from time to time lived here, regularly visited the island and went to the graves of their ancestors until 1974. Today the Jewish cemetery is situated to the south west of Ercan airport, inside the KTBK (Cyprus Turkish Peace Force) military zone, on the left hand side of the road from the village of Kargı (Margo) to Akincilar.

The Cemetery [1] is surrounded by a stone wall of around 50 cm wide and 100 cm high. There is a metal gate at the entrance. The graves inside have all been opened and the grave stones are in a broken state.



## 7. THE JEWISH COLONY IN KOUKLA (KÖPRÜ) VILLAGE

Information about the Jews in question, who had settled in the village of Köprü has been taken from the testimony of Hüseyin Gökbulut and Naşit Akmansel who still live in the village and who worked alongside the Jews.

**Fig. 3. The Jewish Cemetery in Margo**  
Taken from the article "The forgotten Jews of Cyprus"  
by Yadin Roman. Photography by Doron Horowitz

Around the years of 1930 – 1935 five Jewish families settled in the village of Köprü (Koukla). Information about the Jewish families who lived in Köprü from 30th September 1946 is as follows [2]:

### **Papper Family:**

Anne-Liesse PAPPER	: Female. Age 36. German Jew. Pasaport No: 6852
Otto Erich PAPPER	: Male. Age 36. German Jew. Pasaport No: 743
Marianne PAPPER	: Female (daughter of Otto Erich and Anne-Liesse)
Jean PAPPER	: Female (daughter of Otto Erich and Anne-Liesse)

### **Berdy Family:**

Michael Wolf Berdy	: Male. Age 53
Rosa Berdy	: Female. Age 53
Gabriel Berdy	: Male. Age 31 (son of Michael and Rosa)
David Winston Berdy	: Male. Age 6. (son of Gabriel)

### **Bernat Family:**

Joseph BERNAT	: Male.
Athiena BERNAT	: Female.
2 daughters	: No information could be found about names.

### **Shapiro Family [3]**

: (Mother and father and 2 daughters). (No information could be found about names).

### **Mirmovich Family [4]**

: (Mother and father and 2 daughters). (No information could be found about names).

These families during their first years had started agriculture and planted wheat, barley, "havetta" (a plant endemic to Cyprus, grown as animal feed) and flax. Later because of the plentiful water available in the area and because citrus was a more profitable product they turned to citrus fruit farming. They named their farm "Koukla Kıbrıs Çiftçilik Şirketi" (Cyprus Farming Company of Koukla - Kypriagi Agrodigi Eteriya Kuklon)

In order to irrigate their citrus trees they built two concrete water tanks of about 500 m<sup>3</sup> on the top of the highest hill, one open the other closed and they installed 15 diesel water pumps to the wells of the area. On Saturdays and Sundays they would turn on all the water pumps to fill the main water tank and during the week they would water the whole area with the help of gravity. The main source of water was constituted by from wells dug parallel to the İncirlik road and linked to one another underground.

Against popular belief the families who settled in the village of Kukla were not very religious and it is said that Mr Otto Erich in particular was in the habit of going to church whilst his wife Anne-Liesse went to the synagogue. It is also said that all the Jews in the village spoke Greek well.



**Fig. 4. Water Tank of volume 500 m<sup>3</sup>**

Rather than sending their two daughters to the village school they would send them to the Jewish school in the Margo Farm about 30 kms away every day. Mr Papper was the wealthiest amongst them and owned a car and tractors. One day because he traded with the Turks the Greeks put a bomb in Mr. Pappers car and this incident frightened him very much.

During the 2nd World War the Jews in Kukla village experience very difficult times. The fact that Mr. Papper was spying for the Germans and was caught caused the Jews to be ostracised. 4 or 5 years after the war ended, around the start of the 50s they sell all their property in the village of Kukla and leave the island.

The land and other items put up for sale by the Jews was bought by Binyannu from a nearby Greek village.

## 8. THE TOWN FOUNDED IN CYPRUS BY THE JEWS

In the report of the "The Jewish Daily Post" of 21st July 1935 titled, "The Town Founded in Cyprus by the Jews", the town of Fassouri founded by the Jews in the Akrotiri (Ağrotur) area is mentioned. "Under the benevolent behaviour of the British Colonial authorities the settlement of Jews on the island of Cyprus continues. The small town of Fassouri [5], remanient of the settlements in Palestine, founded by Jewish refugees can be seen as an example of this. Saplings have been planted, the lakes which breed malaria carrying mosquitos have been dried out and Hebrew is being spoken in the town. Two Jewish teachers funded by the colonial authorities have been appointed to the town."

## 9. JEWISH PROPERTY IN CYPRUS

The Jews who came to Cyprus as refugees bought 19,856 donums of land in different areas of the island, as is set out below.

Lefkoşa (Nicosia) Area: 1,690 donum.

Khrysiliou, Kargı (Margo Farm), Kalokhorio (Kaputi), Güzelyurt (Morphou), Eylence (Eylenja), Ay Demet (Ayios Dometios)

Larnaca Area: 9,863 donum.

Mednevi (Meneou), Çite (Kiti), Bahçeler (Perivolía), Softalar (Sopthades), Mormenekşe (Dhromolaxia), Civisil (Kivisi), Voroglini (Voroklini), Larnaka, Livatya (Livadhia), Ormiyta (Ormihia), Ksilodimbu (Xylotymbou), Pile (Pyla), Beyarmudu (Pergamos), Aradip (Aradiphou), Yıldırım (Kellia)

Limasol Area: 5,456 donum.

Ağrotur (Akrotiri), Asomatos, (Koloş (Kolossi), Zakaki, Çerkes Farm (Cherkes Chiftlik), Polemitya (Polemihia), ayia Phyla, Ypsonas, Trakhoni, Episkopi.

Mağusa (Famagusta) Area: 2,833 donum.

Derinya (Dherinia), Türkmenköy (Kondea), Köprü (Kouklia), Maraş (Varosha), İncirli (Makrasyka), Çayönü (Kalopsida), Düzce (Athna)

Baf (Phaphos) Area: 0 donum

Girne (Kyrenia) Area: 13 Donum  
Upper Kyrenia (Pano Kyrenia)

## REFERENCES

1. Cemetary. Despite all my requests to the Commander of the Corps permission was not given for me to go to or photograph the cemetery.
2. Source of information. Greek National archive Lefkoşa (Nicosia)
3. Shapiro family: Source of information Hüseyin Gökbulut
4. Mirmovich family: Source of information Hüseyin Gökbulut
5. Fassouri: Fassouri is a settlement area situated 1 km south west of the village of Gözügüzel (Asamatos), on the Akrotiri peninsula in the south of Cyprus.

## REFERENCE BOOKS:

There are no books which can give Reference to this document.

All the information has been taken from newspaper clippings from different dates in the “Jewish Refugees” titled file in the National Archive of the British Colonial Period Government situated in the Greek area of Lefkoşa (Nicosia), from notes and from Hüseyin Gökbulut and Naşit Akmansel who still live in the village of Köprü and worked alongside the Jewish Refugees.

## NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS AND NOTES IN THE FILE:

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