

Harbours, harbour works and commerce in Cyprus, 1878–1910*

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The lack of harbour facilities was always a setback in the financial development of Cyprus. The paper aims to describe the harbour facilities of the island in 1878–1879, and to analyse how the harbour works in Limasol, Larnaca and Kyrenia in 1881, 1882 and 1890 respectively and in Famagusta harbour in 1905, affected the shipping and commercial activity of the coastal towns. At the same time it will outline how much was spent on the harbour works and its authorisation. All of these factors will highlight to what extent the harbour works contributed to the economic development of Cyprus.

The aim of this paper is to describe the state of the harbour facilities of Cyprus between 1878 and 1879 as these were perceived by British officials and travellers who arrived on the island at that time. In addition, it intends to analyse how the harbour works in Limassol, Larnaca and Kyrenia in 1881, 1882 and 1890 respectively and in Famagusta harbour in 1905, impacted on the shipping and commercial activity of the coastal towns. Lastly, it will examine the amount of money spent on the above harbour works. The source material comes from the Annual Reports and Blue Books of Cyprus, from books written at the time and other published accounts. The paper is based on an ongoing research project and consequently some of the results might be enriched or changed.

Historical Background

Cyprus came under British administration in July 1878 after the signing of the Cyprus Convention. This Anglo-Turkish agreement was signed during the Congress of Berlin

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as a result of behind-the-scenes discussions between British and Ottoman delegates.¹ Through this Convention, Britain was seeking to acquire a *place d'armes* and a naval base for the British fleet.² However, it became clear that due to the lack of harbours, Cyprus would maintain its strategic value, would be transformed into a key naval base and gain recognition for its military importance, only after the harbour of Famagusta was repaired.³

The harbours of Cyprus

As noted above, in 1878 Cyprus had no harbours. There were only three safe anchorages in Famagusta, Larnaca and Limassol. These were too shallow and during windy days the vessels could anchor but could not access the shore. Paphos and Kyrenia, the other two ports of the island, were even shallower, so during the winter months it was impossible for any vessel to approach.⁴ Though plans were drawn for developing the Famagusta Harbour as a naval station, due to the occupation of Egypt in 1882, all such plans were rendered worthless as the route to India through the Suez Canal was now safe.⁵ Thus it was perceived that the harbours of Cyprus could be used only for transferring goods and passengers for commercial and (rarely) for military reasons.

In 1878 and until the First World War, Larnaca was the main “commercial town of Cyprus”.⁶ However, according to the Royal Engineer, Hugh M. Sinclair, in 1878 the sea front of Larnaca “present[ed] a most miserable appearance”.⁷ Based on the descriptions of travellers who visited the island between 1878 to 1879, the steamers and vessels calling at Larnaca, were anchored about half a mile from the shore. All cargoes were landed by a number of lighters employed for this purpose. Several wooden jetties “of inferior [...] construction” in front of the quay served as landing places from the lighters.⁸

Limassol was also an open anchorage with limited landing facilities. The following description of the way goods were disembarked and loaded to the shore, by Samuel Baker, clearly shows how the lack of landing facilities made the whole procedure difficult:

¹ Headlam-Morley, 1930:193; Lee, 1934:105; Langer, 1939:159.

² Buckle, 1920:251–2; TNA, FO 358/1, Part III, Memorandum by Lieutenant Colonel Home, 8 June 1878.

³ Lee, 1934:77.

⁴ Savile, 1878:70.

⁵ Some plans for the construction of the Famagusta harbour are: TNA, CO 67/2, Hamilton H. Fulton to the Marquis of Salisbury, 3 August 1878; TNA, FO 78/3374, Report by Mr Ormiston C.I.E., M. Inst. C.E. on improvements proposed at the harbour of Famagusta dated January 10, 1880; TNA, CO 67/25, J.H. Smith to the Colonial Office, 25 May 1881; TNA, CO 67/28, Major General Pasley to the Admiralty, 24 August 1882.

⁶ Savile, 1878:44.

⁷ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):204.

⁸ Baker, 1879:2.

[...] H.M.S. Torch was in the roadstead, together with about twenty vessels of various flags and tonnage. Some of these were loading wine for Trieste, and it was interesting to watch the system adopted to save the difficulty of embarking the heavy casks in lighters, in the absence of cranes or winches. The barrels when full were slightly inferior in weight to their displacement of sea-water; they accordingly floated almost level with the surface and were formed into a chain of two casks abreast and about fifty yards in length. Thus arranged, they were towed by boats until alongside the vessel, when they were easily hoisted up on board. As boats could not lie against the perpendicular wall of the quay except during a perfect calm, there was considerable trouble in carrying on the commerce of the port according to modern requirements; but the inventions of necessity had simplified many difficulties at the expense of increased manual labour. Boats lay a few yards off the shore, and were loaded by men who walked shoulder-sleep with the packages upon their heads. I saw lighters discharging planks and baulks of timber, by shooting them into the sea with sufficient force to follow the direction given towards the shore, while the receivers stood in the water to capture them upon arrival.⁹

According to the same source, Famagusta was “the only real harbour” of the island which could accommodate large vessels.¹⁰ However, in 1878 it was a neglected place, full of mud which had made its way there courtesy of the Pedias River.¹¹ As the water was too shallow due to the silt that had been covering the bottom for centuries, in 1879, only a number of native vessels could anchor in safety.¹²

In the ports of Kyrenia and Paphos the landing facilities were so poor that vessels could not call even with a moderate breeze. At the same time the waters were very shallow and it was necessary to clear and dredge the bottom.¹³

Harbour works

Due to the state of the harbour facilities of the island, the British commenced several minor repairs and extensions on the existing piers. In this paper we will only focus on those repairs occurring between 1878 to 1910 and considered to be important and effective at that time.¹⁴

As soon as the British arrived in Larnaca, they constructed two piers, known as the Custom House piers (due to their closeness to the custom house) 120 feet each in length and at a cost of £150.¹⁵ A third pier was built “under the immediate superintendence of H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, [...] for landing and shipping Government stores”.¹⁶

⁹ Baker, 1879:257–258.

¹⁰ Baker, 1879:154.

¹¹ Baker, 1879:100, 154.

¹² Baker, 1879:154; Savile, 1878:65.

¹³ Baker, 1879:183, 215.

¹⁴ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):142, 187.

¹⁵ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):202.

¹⁶ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):193. Unfortunately the cost of this construction has not been traced yet. According to Cavendish, 1991:9: H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, the second son of Queen Victoria, “has been confided the arrangements for landing troops”.

This pier was 150 feet long and although it was built as a temporary structure for the needs of the British army, it lasted in fair condition until 1883.¹⁷

According to Hugh M. Sinclair, the above piers were not accessible in all weather conditions. He subsequently suggested the construction of an iron pier.¹⁸ This happened in 1881–1890 due to the British administration's decision to improve the landing facilities of Limassol, Larnaca and Kyrenia for commercial reasons.¹⁹

Based on a report by the British government engineer Samuel Brown, the iron piers in Limassol (600 feet long) and in Larnaca (450 feet long) cost £5,600 and £3,400 respectively. The Limassol pier was opened to the public on 6 October 1881 and the Larnaca pier on 8 November 1882, both by the High Commissioner of the island, after a special ceremony organised on the sea front of each town.²⁰ According to Biddulph, the High Commissioner of Cyprus in 1879–1886, both constructions gave “great satisfaction to the mercantile community” and although the winter of 1881–1882 was a stormy one, there was no difficulty “on embarking or disembarking passengers or mails”.²¹ According to Biddulph's report in 1882, the aforementioned constructions had been the most important public works of the year in which they were constructed.²²

A few years later, in 1886, due to the same decision to improve the landing facilities, harbour works started in Kyrenia port. These improvements were completed in 1890 and the total cost was £9,228.²³

Due to the occupation of Egypt in 1882, the first development of Famagusta harbour only commenced in 1902, for commercial reasons. Based on the construction plans prepared by Coodes and Partners in 1899, the inner harbour was dredged and further accommodation for sailing vessels and local crafts was also provided. The redevelopment of Famagusta harbour cost £126,600, an immense amount for the Cyprus budget.²⁴ In order to realise how large the specific amount was, we have to bear in mind that the total expenditure of Cyprus in 1905 was £251,916. The money came from a special loan granted to Cyprus from the British Parliament in 1899.²⁵ The loan was a result of the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain's agenda for creating a “Greater Britain” by improving the financial conditions and facilities of Britain and its overseas territories.²⁶

¹⁷ *Cyprus, No. 2 (1880)*:202.

¹⁸ *Cyprus, No. 2 (1880)*:193–194, 202, 204.

¹⁹ TNA, FO 78/3374, Robert Biddulph to the Earl Granville, 21 June 1880; TNA, FO 78/3374, Major General Sir R. Biddulph K.C.M.G., C.B., to the Right. Hon. The Earl of Kimberley, 21 May 1881.

²⁰ TNA, FO 78/3374, Robert Biddulph to the Earl Granville, 21 June 1880; TNA, FO 78/3374, Major General Sir R. Biddulph K.C.M.G., C.B., to the Right. Hon. The Earl of Kimberley, 21 May 1881; Maragkou, 1997:280.

²¹ *Report [...] for 1881*:10–11, 25; *Cyprus, Report [...] for 1882*:6, 85.

²² *Report [...] for 1881*:10–11, 25; *Cyprus, Report [...] for 1882*:6, 85; TNA, FO 78/3374, Samuel Brown to Lord Tenterden K.C.B., 16 July 1880.

²³ *Cyprus Blue Book for 1890–1891*:74.

²⁴ *Cyprus. Annual Report for 1904–1905*, 1905:37.

²⁵ *Cyprus Blue Book for 1905–1906*:53.

²⁶ Jenness, 1962:165; Georgallides, 1979:29; Ferguson, 2004:240–255.

Commercial activity

During the first years of the British occupation the commercial activity was very moderate. This gradually changed but none of the Cyprus ports ever became an important commercial centre in the Mediterranean. There were several reasons preventing the commercial bloom of the Cypriot ports. The lack of landing facilities described above and the limited budget for public works were some of the most important reasons. Apart from this, the Cypriots were not enthusiastic about imported products. The lack of money and the Cypriots' consumer behaviour were among the reasons which prevented them from buying any luxury products or goods that were not considered a necessity.²⁷ At the same time the lack of direct links between the ports of Cyprus and the leading commercial ports of Europe and the Mediterranean was also an important reason. Specifically, a direct route between the ports of Cyprus and the European and Mediterranean ports on a weekly basis, occurred during the first years of the 20th century.²⁸ Besides the above, there was a great loss in the trade activity of the island due to the withdrawal of the 3,500 soldiers and sailors who had been stationed on the island in 1878. This caused "the closing of several mercantile houses" especially in Larnaca in 1879.²⁹ The worst part of it was that the government, instead of taking measures to "counterbalance this withdrawal", in 1896 decided to transfer from the island the majority of whatever British army units that had been left.³⁰ This caused further decline in commercial activity.³¹

The merchants also had to put up with the Custom House regulations and officers. The following narration by a merchant of Larnaca shows the situation clearly:

[In the Custom House] every box is broken open and the contents strewed upon the ground. The duty is ad valorem upon all articles and an ignorant Turk is the valuer. This man does not know the difference between a bootjack and a lemon-squeezer: only the other day he valued wire dish-covers as 'articles of head dress' (probably he has seen wire fencing masks). If he is perplexed, he is obliged to refer the questionable article to the Chief Office, — this is two hundred yards from the landing place: — thus he passes half the day in running backwards and forwards with trifles of contested value to his superior, while crowds are kept waiting, and the store is piled with goods most urgently required.³²

Speaking with numbers

It is interesting to see how initially the lack of landing facilities, and subsequently the harbour works and the commercial and shipping activity had an impact on the

²⁷ Baker, 1879:465.

²⁸ Savile, 1878:63; Jenness, 1962:175; Zannetos, 1997, v. 3:65, 479.

²⁹ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):262.

³⁰ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):262.

³¹ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):262; Zannetos, 1997, v. 2:827.

³² Baker, 1879:12–13.

financial development of the island. This will be presented through the statistical data collected at the time by the customs and port departments of the island. Due to the availability of information at this stage of the research, I used the data from the first Annual Report of Cyprus published in 1879 and the data from the Blue Books of Cyprus for every five years.

Comparing the import activity of Larnaca and Limasol with the import activity of Cyprus (in general) we note that during the period 1878–1910, approximately 70% of the goods imported in the island came from the port of Larnaca and 20% came from the port of Limassol. Although it is written in the bibliography that Limassol was the main export port of the island, we have to note that from Larnaca the products exported were at about 40% thus (approximately) the same percentage of products exported from Limassol. However since 1893 and until 1911 Larnaca was the main export port (see Table 1 and Table 2).³³

What is remarkable is the significant increased activity noted in the Famagusta harbour. The exports gradually had increased since 1893–1894 (see Table 1). We assume that the merchants started using the facilities offered in Famagusta more frequently, because by that time the Legislative Council had already discussed the possibility of constructing the Cyprus Railway and connecting the inland of Cyprus with the port of Famagusta.³⁴ However, the bloom in the commercial activity in Famagusta occurred after the completion of the repairs in 1905, and a decade later became the main commercial port of the island. By 1910, five years after the redevelopment, the value of exports from Famagusta harbour increased to 15–17% of the total value. This was a huge improvement because in 1878, only 4% of the island's exports were leaving from Famagusta (see Table 1). The increase in the import activity is even greater. Although in 1878 the imports entering through Famagusta were below 0,1%, in 1905–1906, 11% of the total value imported in the island was arriving in Famagusta and in 1910–1911, 17% of the imported products were arriving in Famagusta. This affected mainly Larnaca port and especially its import activity (see Table 2).

Based on the above we understand that the harbour works which were completed in Larnaca, Limassol and Kyrenia in 1881, 1882 and 1890 respectively, did not significantly affect the commercial activity of the ports. Thus any minor repairs or pier constructions, did actually improve the landing facilities of the ports but apparently this did not increase their commercial activity and therefore did not bring in any more money.

Regarding the commercial activity of Cyprus between 1878 and 1900, we note that both import and export activity was mainly stable since 1887–1888 (see Table 3). Although we did not trace any information to justify this, we assume that this is the result of the economic depression of the island due to the drought of 1887. This reduced the production of wheat, wine and cotton seed which were among the most

³³ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):141; Baker, 1879:256, 411.

³⁴ Zannetos, 1997, v. 2:717; Jenness, 1962:132.

important export products.³⁵ On the other hand, the stable increase of imports and exports since 1905 was, among others, affected by the signs of farmers enjoying financial improvement during the first years of the 20th century. What reinforces this is the opening of bank branches in Cyprus and peasants using agricultural machinery especially after 1902. In the long term, this indisputably helped them to improve the quality and quantity of their production.³⁶ At the same time, the direct steamship connection between Alexandria and Famagusta harbour in 1905 had a great impact on the commercial activity, as larger quantities of goods could be transferred there.³⁷ According to Diamond Janness:

Cyprus's growing prosperity at this time owed as much to its expanding market in Egypt as to favorable prices for its products. Although the pattern of Cyprus' trade hardly changed between 1903 and 1913, its volume almost doubled [...]. Imports grew no faster than exports, so that the balance of trade remained favorable. By 1910 both had expanded so greatly that the government organized a preventive service, which erected 18 coast guard huts around the island's shores to check the operations of smugglers.³⁸

Unfortunately, the shipping activity did not increase proportionally. The larger number of ships shown for 1878–1879 is due to the number of British ships arriving at the island during the first months of the British occupation in order to embark and disembark the British army and all their necessities. That is why in 1887–1888 the decrease is so big (see Table 4). However, according to Table 4, an important increase in the shipping activity of the island simply did not occur. All ports seemed to have a stable activity. Larnaca had 23–35% of the total shipping activity of the island, Limassol 25–32%, Famagusta 17–24%, Kyrenia 1–2% and Paphos 11–13%. The only remarkable reduction was in 1905–1910 in the shipping activity of Limassol and Larnaca. This was due to firstly the redevelopment of Famagusta harbour and secondly, the direct steamship connection of Famagusta with Alexandria.³⁹

Commercial network and vessels' nationality

It is interesting to note that the foreign vessels approaching the harbours of Cyprus called only at Larnaca and Limassol. It was after 1894 that foreign ships called to all ports of the island. The ships were mainly Ottoman but there were also some British, Austrian, French, Italian, Spanish, Danish, Greek, Russian, Maltese and others. It was after 1905 that the ships arriving from Britain increased also in number. The commercial network was between Cyprus and other British Colonies (including places

³⁵ Zannetos, 1997, v. 2:485–492. Janness, 1962:130.

³⁶ Janness, 1962:169–170.

³⁷ Janness, 1962:170, 177.

³⁸ Janness, 1962:170–2.

³⁹ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):16, 142, 181–182, 216–218.

like Malta, Hong Kong, Fiji islands, India etc.), and with Turkey and Egypt but also Russia, Norway, Belgium, Bulgaria and others.⁴⁰

Who paid?

It has to be noted that the British treasury had actually paid nothing for the harbour works mentioned above. All expenses were covered by the money collected from the Cypriots or from the dues imposed on steamships. Specifically, on 15 April 1879, wharfage dues were imposed on Limassol and Larnaca pier. The money collected from this tax was expected to be used for building a pier and a quay at the above two ports. This would improve the landing facilities and help the merchants avoid spending money on the landing of goods by lighters.⁴¹ According to F. Zannetos, the dues were imposed after an agreement between the merchants of Larnaca and the customs office. According to the agreement, the government would pay for the construction of an iron pier in Larnaca. When the merchants of the town would manage to pay off the amount used for the construction, the pier would belong to the municipality of Larnaca and all dues would belong to them as well. However, this never happened because the British government managed to include the wharfage dues in the government's income.⁴²

Therefore, between the years 1878 and 1887, £21,910 were spent on constructing piers in Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos, Zygi, Famagusta and Kyrenia. The wharfage dues that were received for the use of the pier of Larnaca and Limasol were £23,791. Thus the government spent almost nothing for those works.⁴³ On the contrary, it made a small profit. At the same time, the loan for the reconstruction of Famagusta harbour was paid off by the amount collected by the wharfage dues and from the locust destruction fund.⁴⁴ Since the British government refused to use any money from the British Treasury, the Cypriots were left with limited funds for infrastructure development.

Specifically, Britain, under the terms of the 1878 Cyprus Convention, had to pay to the Porte an annual tribute fixed at £92,000 *per annum*. As the tribute was absorbing 27% of Cyprus's "gross budgetary receipts,"⁴⁵ the island was left alone to develop its facilities. Cyprus's income was enough only to cover the wages of the British officials and expenses of the island's administration and services (hospitals, police, courts, etc.).⁴⁶

⁴⁰ *Cyprus Blue Books for 1886/7–1911*.

⁴¹ *Cyprus*, No. 2 (1880):35.

⁴² Zannetos, 1997, v. 3:22, 29–39.

⁴³ Zannetos, 1997, v. 2: 464–465.

⁴⁴ Zannetos, 1997, v. 3: 29–39, 179.

⁴⁵ Georgallides, 1979:16–7.

⁴⁶ According to Maurice and Wingate (1924:105) the tribute was the amount of money that the British had to pay to the Porte from "the excess of revenue over expenditure" of Cyprus, calculated "by the average of the previous five years". After several negotiations with the Porte, the tribute was fixed at £92,000

Thus, during 1878–1910 the expenses for public works were between 5% to 13% of the total expenditure of Cyprus (see Table 5).

Conclusions

During the first years of the British occupation of Cyprus, the harbour facilities of the island were limited. This inevitably affected the commercial activity and financial development of Cyprus in general. All minor repairs occurred for the extension or construction of piers in Limassol, Larnaca and Kyrenia improved only the landing facilities and nothing more. The redevelopment of Famagusta harbour, the frequent direct steamship route, the minor improvement of the farmers' financial condition and quality of agricultural products, were among the reasons contributing to the development of the commercial activity of Cyprus. Although shipping activity did moderately increase, the commercial network of Cyprus was obviously helped by its new political status. Being under British administration, Cyprus products were sent to the British colonies, even to the most distant ones (like Hong Kong and the Fiji islands). Thus, by transferring Cyprus from Ottoman to British administration, the harbour facilities and the commercial and shipping activity did undoubtedly benefit. However, all development works took place using Cyprus money. The British treasury did not spend a penny on the aforementioned works. As the Cyprus budget also covered part of the annual tribute paid to the Porte, all the wages of the British officials and the expenses of the island's administration and services, the development of the island was rendered slow as the money available for infrastructure was further limited. Consequently, Cyprus under British administration and (later on) as a British colony had only small periods of financial development but never a period of financial bloom. However, we cannot avoid the temptation to wonder if the initiative for developing the aforementioned harbour works and the concession of the 1899 British loan would occur without Cyprus being under British administration. As history does not respond to hypothetical questions, the only answer we can give is that the Cyprus economic miracle will occur much later on, after 1974.

per annum. However, the revenue of Cyprus was over-estimated, the expenditure of the island was very low and the financial condition of the Cypriots did not "permit" further tax increases. Therefore, the parliament was forced to vote a grand-in-aid of approximately £30.000–£50.000 *per annum* in order "to meet the deficit which occurred after the tribute had been paid".

Tables (Source material: *Cyprus, No. 2 [1880], Report by her Majesty's high commissioner for the year 1879; Cyprus Blue Books for 1886/7–1911, Government printing office, Nicosia 1887–1911*)

Table 1

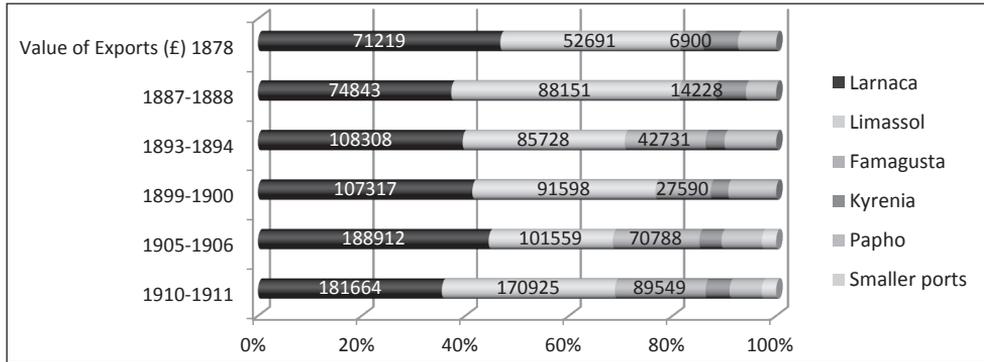


Table 2

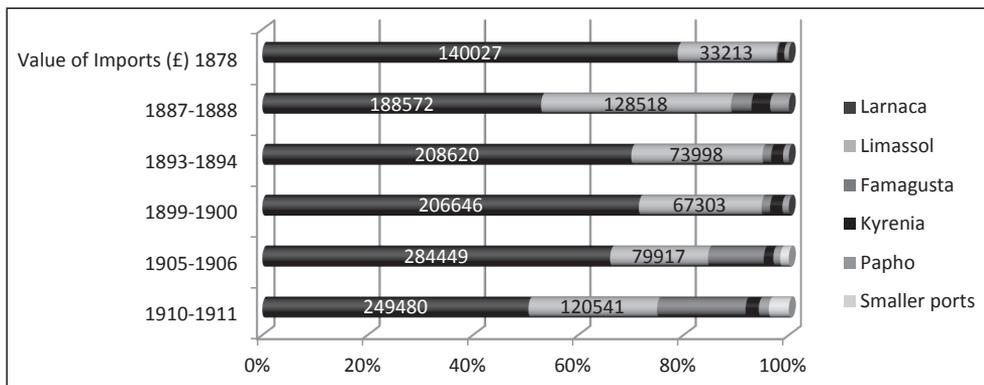


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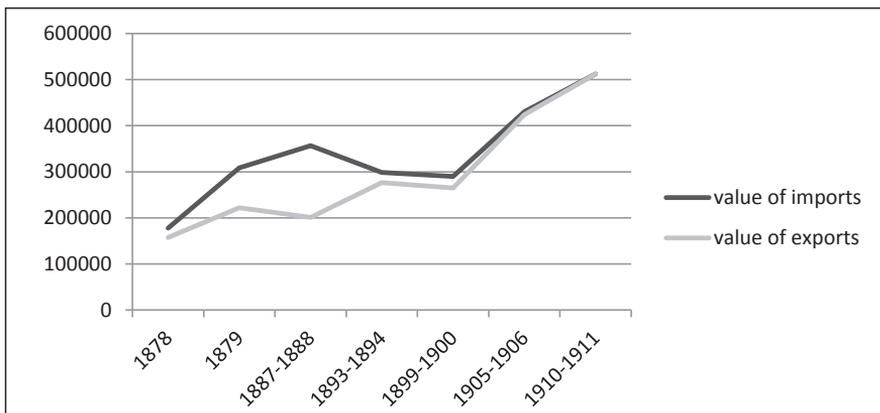


Table 4

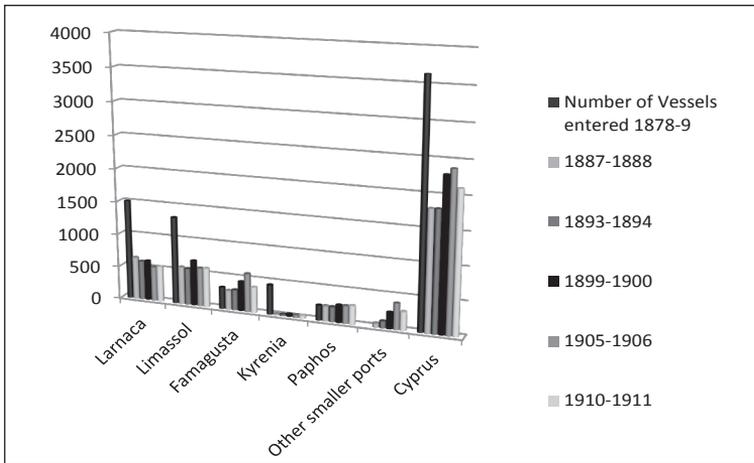
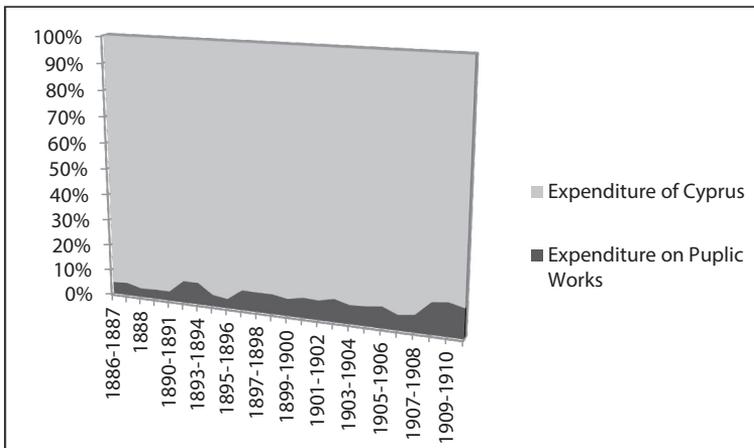


Table 5



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