

Original Article

Healthcare Services in Cyprus during the Ottoman Period 1571 – 1878

Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, RN, BSc, MSc

Clinical Coordinator, Nursing Department, Frederick University, Nicosia, Cyprus

Dimos Dimitriades, RN, BSc, MSc

Nicosia General Hospital, Nicosia, Cyprus

Constantina Kaloudi, RN, BSc, MSc

PASYDY Nursing Home, Nicosia, Cyprus

Despina Sapountzi-Krepia, RN, RHV, BSc, MSc, PhD

Professor and Chair, Department of Nursing Frederick University, Nicosia, Cyprus

Correspondence: Dimitrakopoulos Ioannis, 2, Volou Str. Strovolos, Nicosia 2060, Cyprus

E-mail: limyiandem@yahoo.gr

Abstract

Background: For health professionals, the knowledge of the history of their art is central, both to understanding their science, but also their practice within the health care system. Therefore, it was necessary recounting the development of scarce public health services in Cyprus during the Ottoman rule (1571 - 1878) before their rapid development during the British rule (1878 - 1960).

Objective: The purpose of this study is the historical overview of the development of public health services in Cyprus during the Ottoman rule, from 1571 to 1878.

Methodology: Methodology of historical research has been used. More specifically, primary, secondary and tertiary sources were used through the review of domestic and international literature. Specifically, the entire search included: history books, Cypriot medical encyclopaedias and previous research, reports of colonial administrative officers, Cyprus Blue Book and Cyprus Gazette.

Results – Conclusions: Finding primary sources was extremely difficult, some of the primary sources were various reports of foreign travellers in Cyprus during the Ottoman rule, the first years of British rule after 1878 and the first reports of various British colonial administrative officers. During the Ottoman period the lack of any health service was evident and there was no effective state welfare for medical or nursing care for the residents of Cyprus. The only health care structures throughout the Ottoman period were the infirmary of the monastery of nuns in Larnaca, the Leper Farm and the Quarantines that operated at the two ports of the island. The foundation of the first health structures in Cyprus reached with the concession of domination of the island by the Ottomans to the British.

Keywords: Cyprus, Health Services, Historical Development, Ottoman rule, Medicine, Nursing, Midwifery and combination of those words.

Introduction

Throughout the duration of the Ottoman rule of Cyprus there was no effective state care for the patients, therefore effective hospitals were never established nor functioned (Vrionidou-Giagkou et al., 2006). Historically the Ottoman period is divided into pre-tanzimat (1299-1839) and post-tanzimat period (1839-1924). This separation was based on the various legislative reforms that held after 1839. During the pre-tanzimat Ottoman period, sources mention the existence of a military hospital near the Paphos Gate in Nicosia (Figure 1), but without any specific reference to its operation. It was the only general hospital on the island. During the post-tanzimat period (1839-1878), legislations and codes established which included provisions relating to the regulation of the medical profession (Georgiades 1995 & 2001). Furthermore, post-tanzimat period is characterized by the adoption of the "millet" system. Millet means nation in Arabic and refers to Islamic rules concerning the management of non-Muslim populations (minorities) living within the empire. The differentiation of the population was not based on the nation or on their language, but on their religion. Therefore, every religious authority had the opportunity to command the non-Muslim minorities, but under the control of the Sublime Porte (the Sultan). This system strengthened the position of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, which acquired power and beyond its participation, in both, the administration of the island and the education of the Christian Cypriots, addresses measures relating to public health (Philippou, 1975).

Methodology

Historical research is defined as the collection, evaluation and analysis of successive events of the past, a process that may be useful for the study and understanding of behaviours in the present and the prediction of them in the future. (Dimitropoulos, 1999; Polit & Beck 2004). In our research it has been used methodology of historical research using primary, secondary and tertiary sources through systematic review of domestic and international literature and online

searching. Specifically, the entire search included: history books, Cypriot medical encyclopaedias, previous research papers, colonial government publications - The Cyprus Civil List, Blue Books (1887-1894), The Cyprus Gazette (1878-1959).

Finding of primary sources was extremely difficult, some of the few primary sources were the reports of foreign travellers in Cyprus during the Ottoman rule (1571-1878) and the first years of British rule, and the first reports of various colonial administrative functionaries. The secondary and tertiary sources were various researches, books and medical/nursing historical researches. The study of the primary sources was conducted by a systematic review by chronology and parallel coupling of the data collected at a later stage from the secondary and tertiary sources.

Public Health Situation

Information concerning the situation of public health during the last years of the Ottoman rule and the first years of the British colonization can only be exported from the descriptions of various individuals and consuls on the island and on the first reports of the British administration. It is worth mentioning that foreign travellers remained stunned by the situation regarding public health measures that the Turkish Administration never applied (Vrionidou-Giagkou et al., 2006).

Glaring example is a reference of the book of Magda Ohneflach-Righter, a traveller in Cyprus in the period 1894 - 1913, who talks about a total lack of state medical infrastructure during the Turkish occupation. She writes: "The fact that there was no medical service or hospital under the Turkish Domination, needs not to be reported". Magda Ohneflach-Righter even describes the unsanitary conditions in the city of Larnaca, where the streets were filled with piles of rotting bones, meat, fish, fruit and vegetable residues, which were not even deigned by the countless stray dogs. Also, inside courtyards of mosques and churches there were flat graves of rotting human corpses, endless animal corpses etc. (Ohnefalsch-Righter, 1994).

Sir Garnet Wolseley, the first British High Commissioner in Cyprus, described in 1878, in his log that Larnaca resembles a quarantine full

of dirt and fever, while states that if cholera hits inhabitants will decimate the population (Cavendish, 1991).

The English physician William Steele, who was in charge of the medical services in Limassol in a report, describes the miserable situation in the city in December 1879. The streets were filled with human waste and other impurities, and finally referred to the great problem presented in separation of wells from adjacent tanks of toilets (Georgiades, 2001). (Figure 2)

Another English doctor, W.H. McNamara-provincial medical officer in Famagusta-describes sanitary conditions as deplorable. Indicatively, he refers to the malnourished, poor and dirty people, while weak and sick children are almost everywhere. Finally he notes that malaria decimates people (McNamara, 1879).

The chief medical officer Dr. Frederick Charles Heidenstam mentioned in December 1880, that the sanitary conditions in most private homes are not at all satisfactory. Garbage and debris of any kind were allowed to accumulate in tanks and culverts; he characterizes them as reliable sources of diseases. He moreover, talks of arbitrary various state officials carrying garbage and other debris from public buildings and private residences of foreign residents, and lay them, in the most arbitrary manner outside the city, thus creating a "zone of communicable and other harmful substances" around the cities (Georgiades, 2001). (Figure 3)

Quarantine (Lazareta)

Around the mid-19th century and particularly during the decades of 1830 and 1840 Cypriots gradually began to understand the need for institutionalization of measures which would protect them from various epidemics. The same period fundraisers were conducted between the local population of Larnaca to create an institution to control and limit outbreaks transmitted by ships directed to the port city (Georgiades, 2001; Michaelides, 2010). Finally in early 1835 after Christian and Muslim inhabitants initiative, a fundraiser was carried for establishing the Quarantine. During the same year the sultan issued a firman (directive) ordering the establishment of Lazareta (Quarantine) throughout the ports of the

Ottoman Empire. In the city of Larnaca the Medieval castle was used as Quarantine till 1845 (Figure 4), which later moved 1 km away from the city and worked until 1935. In Limassol, the Quarantine was built by the fundraisers conducted by Christians around 1845 (Maragkou and Kolotas, 2006). (Figure 5)

Nuns Hospital in Larnaca

Besides the Turkish military hospital near the Paphos Gate in Nicosia, the only private hospital that existed in Cyprus during the Ottoman period was the infirmary at the House of the Nuns in Larnaca (Figure 6). It was established between the years 1844 - 1846 with the Order of the Franciscan Nuns on the initiative of French nationals and funded by the French Government and the Emperor Napoleon III. In addition, the hospital building included presbytery, school and church (Georgiades, 2001). Since 1844 the infirmary accepted patients on a daily basis for examination and treatment. The sources mention that the main physician was Josef Irene Foblant (Figure 7), who, with the help of nurses - nuns provided free health services to patients until 1922. The medications were administered by the French Government. Patients from the surrounding villages, but especially those suffering from malaria, ophthalmia and intestinal disorders proceeded to the infirmary. As mentioned above, the patients were examined by Dr Josef Irene Foblant followed by a nun with hospital expertise (Michaelides, 2010).

Leprosarium

According to the report of the Chief Medical Officer F.C. Heidenstam in March 1890 "Leprosy in Cyprus", leprosy probably appeared on the island around 1600 AD, as opposed to other Eastern countries which leprosy appeared three centuries before. According to the report, the disease was dispersed in the island by Palestinian pilgrims who visited the monastery of Trooditissa in Troodos mountains. It also states that "... lepers ostracized from their villages, resorted to vagrancy and relied solely on alms of charitable people...". The lepers used to gather in an adjacent trench near Famagusta Gate in Nicosia and could easily beg transforming this space for a permanent place to stay (Heidenstam, 1890). (Figure 8)

Figure 1: Paphos Gate, Nicosia in 1932, Postcard (Source: “Levention” Municipal Museum of Nicosia)

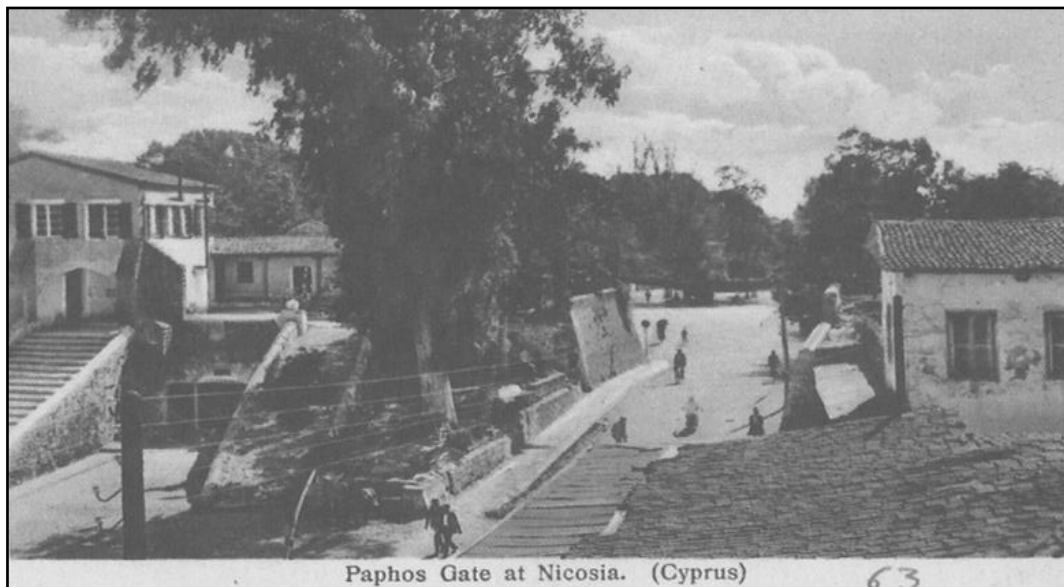


Figure 2: The coastal main road of Limassol in 1878 (Source: www.foni-lemessos.com/)



Figure 3: Street in Nicosia in 1900 (Source: www.skyscrapercity.com/)



Figure 4: Lanraka Medieval Castle in 1878 which was used as Quarantine (Source: larnaka.wordpress.com/)



Figure 5: Limassol Quarantine (Source: Historical Archives of Limassol Municipality "Pattihis Nikos")

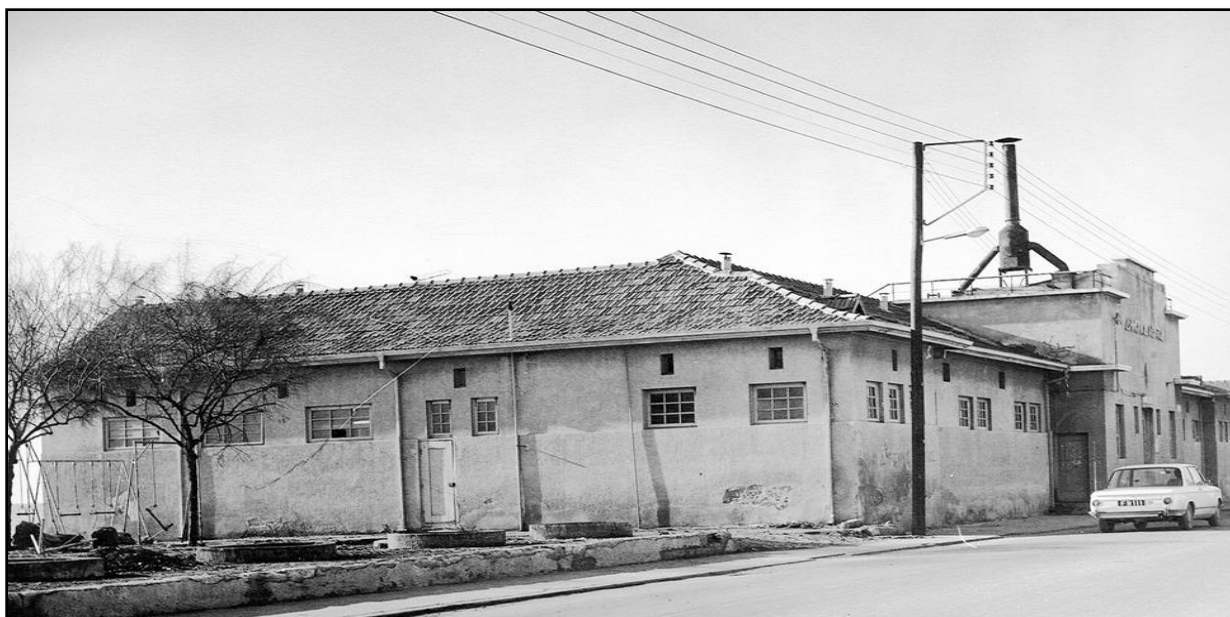


Figure 6: House of the Nuns in Larnaca (Source: larnaka.wordpress.com/)



**Figure 7: Inscription on the House of the Nuns in Larnaca about Dr Joshep Foblant
(Source: larnaka.wordpress.com/)**

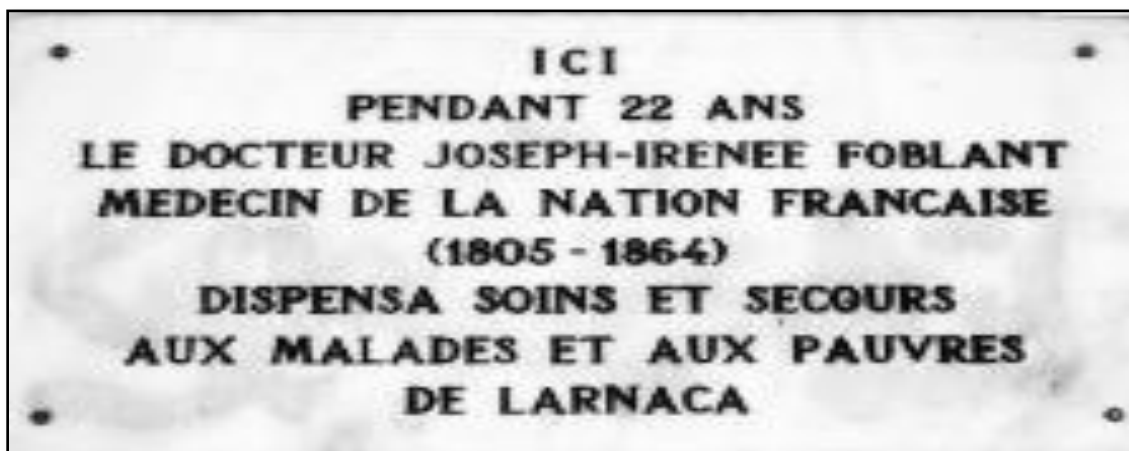
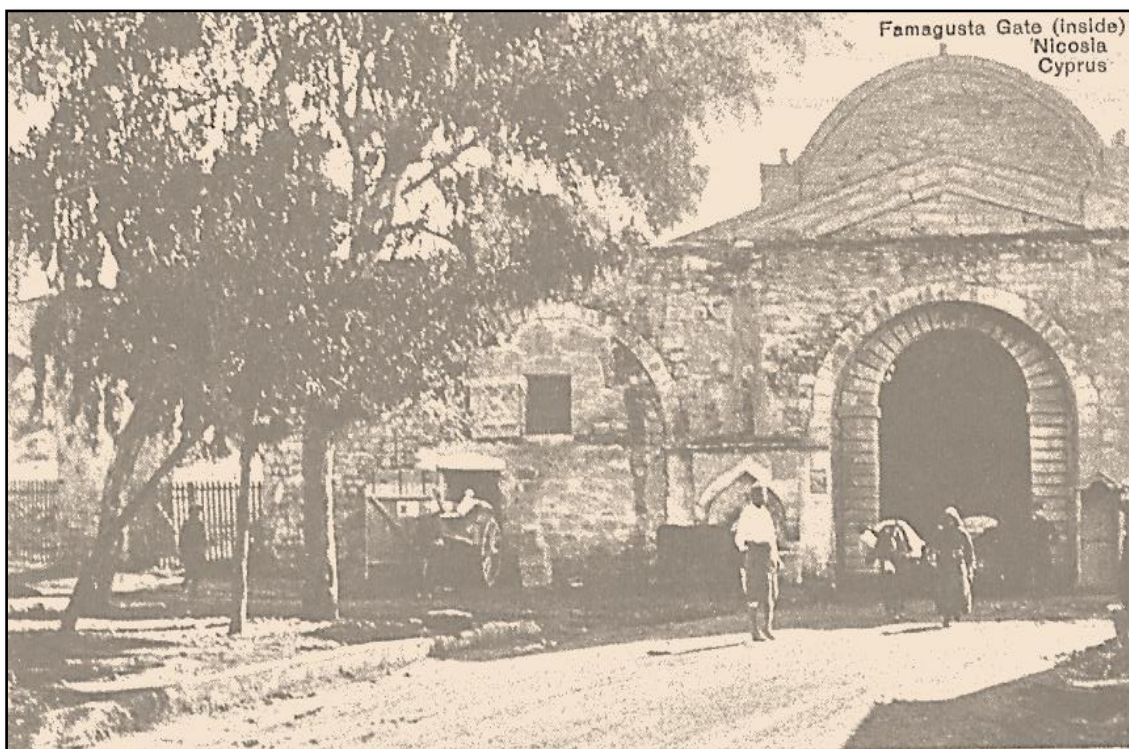


Figure 8: Famagusta Gate, Nicosia in 1905, Postcard (Source: "Levention" Municipal Museum of Nicosia)



On the other hand, the Turkish community and especially the Ottoman Pasha (Governor) of the island was rather irritated by this situation -the congregation of lepers inside and outside the city walls- and ordered their extermination. As a result, the Dragoman Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios who wished to save them, donated in 1800, 500 acres of land 2-3 miles away from the leper colony in "Agia Paraskevi" area where nowadays one can find the Old University of Cyprus. (Hatton Richards, 1903 & Sevasly, 1914)

The expenses for the construction of suitable buildings in the manor of Agia Paraskevi were undertaken by the Ottoman Administration and at the same time they issued a decree while collecting all lepers in the institution, under penalty of death in case of disobedience. On the other hand, the feeding and the clothing cost of patients was undertaken by the Church. Unfortunately, due to lack of organization, a very small amount of patients lived in the area, most of the lepers were scattered throughout the island (Philippou, 1975).

Mental Health Services

Since there was not any state welfare for medical or nursing care for the inhabitants during the Ottoman's rule, there was never any provision for the mentally ill. Asylums and shelters never operated, and most of the times families would take care of the mentally ill or abandon them. Regarding the delinquent mentally ill, the violent and the dangerous, were detained in various prisons of the island, and especially in Konaki in Nicosia, which housed, -during that period- the Ottoman Administration. In exceptional cases only, i.e. when the mental state of a mentally ill showed no improvement in a short time, then s/he was sent to an Asylum in Constantinople. Around 1876 (post - tanzimat period) an Ottoman law concerning the Psychopathic was issued, which provided the safeguarding of the rights of the mentally ill and specific instructions on the procedure for admission, detention and dismissal of the mentally ill in the Asylum. (Georgiadis, 1995 & Michaelides, 1997)

Indigenous or Folk Medicine

Due to shortage of doctors in both, cities and rural areas of the island, the inhabitants had the

mainstay for the treatment of diseases or injuries in folk medicine, also known as indigenous, which can be divided into empirical, magical and religious (Georgiades, 2001).

Folk medicine during the Ottoman rule was the continuity of beliefs that existed on the island in the previous centuries. All information on folk medicine during the Ottomans rule are emanating from clergy by monks, known in Greek as "Ιατροσοφικά - Iatrosofika". According to them, a disease may be due to the penetration in the body of various real or imaginary insects or worms, or toxic viruses from different animals. Furthermore, a disease could have been the result of intervention of a supernatural being, or the effect of weather or stellar conditions. In addition, epidemics were considered divine punishment or tests. The treatments used were herbs and other every day materials. For example, they believed that the bite of the serpent could be cured by strapping and engraving the wound, smearing with oil or saline or placing suction cup in combination with a proper diet, which included mind chicken with wine etc (Mitrofanous, 1924).

Various kinds of folk medical practitioners existed. There was the in Greek "χολάστρα - cholastra" for eye diseases with additional midwifery skills, the in Greek "τζεραχής - tzerachis" for fractures and joints dislocation, the magician for mental illness, the practitioner for syphilis and barbers to whom patients resorted to for bloodletting and removing rotten teeth (Ionas, 2011).

We could certainly not omit the magicians and the exorcists, who were involved in witchcraft, spells and strange rituals to cure various diseases. As expected, the Church considered such acts as diabolical so in an effort to tackle the spread of witchcraft adopted the so called exorcism (Vrionidou-Giagkou et al., 2006).

Midwifery

In Cyprus, the profession of midwifery was practiced only by women- usually older women- who had attended many births. These midwives were called in Greek "μαμές - mames" or "μαμούδες - mamoudes", and they did not have any previous special education. In fact, they were illiterate and full of prejudices. During the last

period of Ottoman occupation, midwifery was exercised by old Turkish women, due to the fact that it was considered a shameful and despicable occupation. More specifically, a midwife was considered to be of a low moral level. In some cases, midwives had an assistant, logically an apprentice named in Greek "καρτούσα - kartousa" (Sotiriades, 1990).

Conclusion – Discussion

All in all during the Ottoman rule, there were a big lack of adequate health institutions and also health professionals in the island. Also during that period the Christians and Muslims of the time chose hospitalization within the bosom of their families.

It is crucial, to mention the institution of folk medicine and the practice of midwifery, institutions which later the British Colonialism, expressly prohibited as one of the measures to improve the health of the inhabitants.

Although historically, there is no evidence that there was a practice of nursing, and by extension of nursing education before the conquest of Cyprus by the British in 1878. During the Ottoman rule of the island, there was no effective state welfare for the medical and nursing care residents of Cyprus. While no one can consider that the first nurses were nuns of the homonymous monastery in Larnaca, there are insufficient data on what their education was or their working techniques. As for the Quarantine which operated in Larnaca and Limassol, no reference is made for the medical staff or at least staff quarters to nurse performing debts. Immediately after the conquest of Cyprus by England, the English Administration launched the first infrastructure and took the first steps to protect the health of residents and appointed doctors and nurses from England.

References

- Cavendish A. (1991) Cyprus 1878: The Journal of Sir Garnet Wolseley. Cultural Centre of Laiki Group, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Dimitropoulos G. E. (1999) Introduction to the methodology of scientific research. Ellin Publications, Athens, Greece.
- Georgiades A. (1995) History of madness in Cyprus during the Ottoman and British rule. Self-published, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Georgiades A. (2001) History of Cyprus Medicine and Nursing during the British rule (1878-1960). Self-published, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Hatton Richards T H. (1903) Cyprus Civil List, Government Printing Office, Nicosia, Cyprus, pp 9-10.
- Heidenstam F. (1890) Report on Leprosy in Cyprus. Printed by Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, United Kindom.
- Ionas I. (2011) Traditional Cyprus Professions. Cyprus Research Centre's Publications XXXVII, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Maragkou A. & Kolotas T. (2006). Journey to a city times. Limassol Municipality Publications, Limassol, Cyprus.
- McNamara W.K. (1879) Topographical and Medical Report of the District of Famagusta of the year 1878 – 1879. Government Printing Office, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Michaelides A. (2010) THE OTTOMAN RULE IN LARNACA - Unknown aspects of life, education and the Cyprus events – Tribute for the fifty years of the Republic of Cyprus October 1960 - October 2010. Publications of Larnaca Municipality, Larnaca, Cyprus.
- Michaelides S. (1997) The role of the supervisor in the Nicosia Psychiatric clinic. Cyprus Nursing School, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Mitrofanous (1924) Iatrosifikon, Publication of Machaira Monastery, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Ohnefalsch-Righter M. (1994) Greek customs in Cyprus: with remarks on its physiognomy and the economy as well as on progress under the English domination. Cultural Centre of Laiki Group, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Philippou L. (1975) The Church of Cyprus during the Ottoman Rule. In Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Polit E. D. & Beck T. C. (2004) Nursing Research Principles and Methods, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Philadelphia, USA.
- Sevasly M. (1914) The Leper Village in Cyprus. The New York Times, 6 July, p.6.
- Sotiriades I. A. (1990) Midwifery in Cyprus among the people. Self-published, Paphos, Cyprus.
- Vrionidou-Giagkou M., Michaelides D., Demosthenous A. et al. (2006) Medicine in Cyprus, from ancient times till the independence. Cultural Centre of Laiki Group, Nicosia, Cyprus.