

CYPRUS PAST AND PRESENT

Ahmet Şükrü ESMER

Cyprus is Mediterranean's third largest island being inferior in size to Sicily and Sardinia and larger than Corsica and Crete. Its area is 3584 square miles (9.282 km²). It is situated in the extreme corner of this sea; forty miles away from the coast of Turkey and in an angle between Turkey and Syria. It's greatest length from West to East is about 140 miles and it's greatest breadth from North to South about 60 miles. The range of mountains that fringes the island's northern coast stretches eastward and forms a pointed peninsula. This is directed like a dagger at the Mediterranean's most easterly gulf, İskenderun Bay on which is situated Turkey's most important southern port of İskenderun (Alexandretta). Between the mountain range of the north and the mighty range in the south, a lowland area stretches from the West coast to the East coast and in the middle of this lies island's capital, Nicosia. Cyprus has no good natural harbors, since its coasts lie parallel to the mountain spines and rise out of a shallow, shoaling sea.

It is the island's situation that has determined it's destiny. It lies between three continents, Europe, Asia, and Africa, inserted between great territories and abodes of peoples, between some of the world's most ancient cultures, and, furthermore, at the crossing point of the oldest routes. Consequently, from ancient times until our own day, power in the Eastern Mediterranean has depended upon the possession of Cyprus. Exposed to the influences of Cilicia on the North, Phoenicia on the East, Egypt on the South and Mycenae on the West, its culture probably received the impress of all these countries. One

Dr. Esmer, is professor of Diplomatic History at the Faculty of Political Science, University of Ankara.

race after another has streamed here, and here cultural influences from all quarters have crossed. One foreign ruler has given place to another in a long and motely cavalcade of different peoples, languages, cultures, religions and races. All these have left traces, and if one wishes to understand the Cyprus of today and what is happening there, one must take all this past into consideration.

The history and the cultural development of Cyprus can be traced to 5.000 years in the past. One can begin to discern events that merit the name of "history" even in the period of about 3.500 years B.C. We see now how from the beginning the island was intimately tied to the Asiatic mainland; the early bronze age seems to have produced the greatest cultural activity. Later on, when the Eastern Mediterranean was the sphere of economic and political interest for great and powerful states—for Egypt in the South, the Hittites in Asia to the North—Cyprus prospered under changing sovereignty. In the 14th and 13th centuries B.C. large merchant towns grew up on the coasts of the island. In these lived peoples of many kinds; among them merchants and artisans from Mycenaean Greece. The culture was a motely mixture of East and West. This flourishing world was smashed to pieces by the strong migrations of many peoples; they brought war, plunder, misfortune with them and also, of course, new racial elements.

It was during this time, from 1300 to 1200 B.C. that the Greeks settled definitely on Cyprus and founded their own communities—small states of which the population retained for the greater part its own language. Cyprus is rich in poetic myths and heroic legends. The Gods of Phoenicia, with their counterparts from Achaia and Egypt had many shrines and many images. The island took its place in Greek myths and sagas. It was here that Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, arose from the sea foam.

In the 8th century B.C. the Phoenicians came and with them a Semitic element. After that a new great power, the Assyrians, held sway from 709 to 540 B.C. An Egyptian interlude followed; and then for 300 years the Persians held sovereignty. During all this time some Greek States of the old-fashioned kind were still to be found among the conglomeration of peoples on Cyprus; language, cultural forms and the shape of the community were for the most part still preserved here, even when they had disappeared in Greece itself. When Athens and Sparta with their Allies, went to war against the

Persians, ten such Greek states existed on Cyprus. Some of them supported the Persians; others supported their enemies.

When in the 4th century B.C. Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, Cyprus also came into his possession. In the Succession after him, the island fell, in 294 B.C. under Egyptian rule, that of Ptolemaic Kings, who were of Macedonian origin. Their rule lasted until 58 B.C. when the island was annexed by the Romans, the Mediterranean's new masters. The island became a district of Cilicia and numbered M.T. Cicero among its governors.

Now came a second great period of prosperity, a peak that the island has never attained since. The Romans produced peace and order, raised great cities, built harbors and roads. They improved industrial activities and mining. The word "copper" comes from the Latin "Cuprum" which in turn comes from Cyprus. Since the oldest times that metal has been the leading natural wealth of Cyprus. During the Roman Empire's period of decline, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Cyprus not only declined with the Romans, but also suffered a series of local misfortunes, earthquakes and famine among others.

When the Roman Empire was divided in 395 A.D. Cyprus naturally became part of the East Roman, or Byzantine domain; and had to share its misfortunes. Paganism was supplanted by Christianity. Then came the rise of Islam. Umayyad califs put up their capital at Damascus. From 650 for 300 years the island was exposed to constant pillaging by the Arabs - who however, never definitely succeeded in conquering it.

After a time of relative calm, in 1160, a Byzantine Greek named Isaac Komenos, established himself as ruler of Cyprus, undisturbed by the Emperor of Constantinople. For the first time Cyprus became an independent power and had a Greek ruler. This situation lasted exactly 31 years. The end was brought about by a most curious episode - an episode which is an extra-ordinary example of the part that chance plays in history. The Crusaders, with their official aim of liberating the Holy Land, but in fact, pillaging wherever they went, were now in full sway; and in 1191 King Richard the Lion-Hearted of England was on his way to Palestine. His fleet was dispersed by a storm, and three ships were stranded on the South coast of Cyprus. On one of these were Richard's sister and his fiancée Berengaria of Navarre. The ruler of Cyprus imprisoned the crew, plundered the ships and treated the Royal ladies in a most disrespectful way. He

seems even to have made indecent suggestions to Berengaria. Naturally, when Richard arrived and learned of all this, he was enraged and he became even more angry when his demand for redress was received with a disrespectful reply. He landed his men and Isaac and his men were a poor match for the few, but veteran English warriors. And Richard found that by accident he had become the master of Cyprus. The first English rule of the island did not last long, but it was to have far reaching consequences which are to a high degree decisive in the present political situation.

But Richard had other work for his soldiers, and wanted money to pay for them, so that when he had been a little while in Palestine, he sold the island to the Knights Templars. They found the administration of the unruly Greek population beyond their powers. They suppressed an insurrection and regretted their purchase. At this juncture, Guy de Lusignan, a noble Frenchman offered to repay to the order the sum which Richard had received for Cyprus, and to assume their rights. The bargain was struck, Guy crossed to Cyprus and took over the island in 1192.

Guy de Lusignan brought with him a number of Latin immigrants, few of them either noble, wealthy, or learned; yet these formed an aristocracy which absorbed the lands of the orthodox farmers, turned peasants into serfs, depressed the native church and kept back the commerce and well-being of the island.

Then began a harsh, but unsuccessful attempt to force a foreign way of life upon the population, during 200 years of French rule. The last King of the Lusignan dynasty died in 1474 when he was one year old and his mother who was of Venetian origin was forced in 1489 to give up the island to a new power in the Mediterranean, the Republic of Venice.

There were eighteen sovereigns of the House of Lusignan. For just a hundred years the first seven Lusignan Kings were absorbed in the assertion of their claims to the shadowy crown of Jerusalem, and in a crusade against the properties of the Orthodox Island Church. In 1291 the fall of Acre, the last Christian stronghold in Syria, drove a very large number of Franks to take refuge in Cyprus. They were favored and enriched by the next ten sovereigns, whose reigns were filled with court intrigues, and futile attempts to gain a footing in Cilicia and Egypt. The historians of the dynasty, generally of Latin race and faith, give but a passing glance at the condition of the Or-

thodox natives, who were considered as serfs ordained to minister to the luxuries and wants of their Frankish masters.

The government of Venice which lasted some eighty years was hardly more tolerant than that of the Lusignans. But for the Venetian merchants, Cyprus was both a strategic outpost and an important bartering place in commerce between Europe and Asia. Meanwhile however, the Sea Route to India around Africa had been discovered in 1486; upon which the old troublesome caravan route from China and India to the East coast of the Mediterranean lost most of its importance. Since at the same time, the Turks began to make large advances Westward, the Venetians were not greatly interested in holding Cyprus. The Turks were greater in numbers than the few remaining Venetian forces, which in 1571 fell before them. People of Cyprus welcomed the Turks as their deliverers and religious freedom was restored.

Shakespeare staged his Othello in Cyprus about this time, thus adding another Romantic episode and he seems to have understood and even supported the Turkish view, when he said in Act 1:

“When we consider
th’importancy of Cyprus to the Turk
and let ourselves again but understand
that as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,
We must not think the Turk is so unskillful
to leave that latest which concerns him first”

The Ottoman rule treated the Christian natives with their traditional tolerance. Travels of Abbé Mariti, published in 1769, describe a peaceful community. With the Greek Revolution in Morea, however, the picture changes. There was collusion between the Orthodox Christians and Greek insurgents, in which a number of prelates were involved. This really is the beginning of the ENOSIS movement. Cyprus from then on has been under the influence of events happening in Greece. An occupation, which lasted from 1832 to 1840 by the troops of Mehmet Ali, viceroy of Egypt, was forgotten as soon as it was over.

Cyprus became Turkish for over 350 years. However, when the Suez canal was opened in 1869, Cyprus once more acquired great political importance and the English returned. The sea route to India was now involved. Since France had declined because of the Franco-Prussian war, the English were able to acquire control over Egypt

and the new route. Cyprus was a necessary strategic halting place. Turkey was then the "sick man of Europe" and by means of various diplomatic tactics, Lord Beaconsfield got the Turkish Sultan who was hard pressed by Russia, to cede Cyprus to Great Britain for an unstipulated period. By a "Convention of Defensive Alliance" dated June 4, 1878, between the Queen and the Sultan, Great Britain undertook to defend Turkey against Russia. The operative part of it was as follows:

"If Batum, Ardahan, Kars, or any of them shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempt shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of any further territories of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in Asia, as fixed by Defensive Treaty of Peace, England engages to join His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in defending them by force".

As a matter of fact, the British violated the territorial integrity of Turkey four years afterwards by occupying Egypt and at the same time intrigued to set up an independent Armenia in the very territories which they engaged to defend against Russia. Cyprus remained formally a part of the Ottoman Empire. However, when the Turks went to war on the German side in 1914, the British annexed the island and in 1925 they declared it a British colony.

The British rule was hardly more intelligent and progressive than that of the French and the Venetians. Following the traditional line of their Colonial policy, the British tried to perpetuate their rule by dividing the two communities. Although there was not much harmony before, the cleavage became deeper under British rule. British rule was especially harsh on the Turkish Community. Although the Greeks enjoyed a large measure of autonomy in managing their affairs, an autonomy inherited from the Turkish rule, the British Colonial government claiming to have stepped in the shoes of the Turkish government and assuming its functions, denied this autonomy to the Turkish Community, laying hands even on *Vakıf* property (Religious Foundations) and using the proceeds for its own ends. Consequently the Turkish Community was politically, economically and socially weakened and many Turks emigrated to Turkey. Many of the present ills are inherited from the British rule.

The latest events in Cyprus must be seen against this background of its long, extremely varied and yet constantly repetitive history. Cyprus has a population of about half a million people, of which

about 80 % are regarded as Greek and the rest as Turks. To be exact, Greek speaking and Turkish speaking Turks were settled on the island by the Ottoman government after the conquest. But any talk of races or origin as those terms are understood, is meaningless here. What matters when it comes to belonging to one or the other of the two groups, is religion. Tolerance of the Ottoman regime allowed the Christian population to survive and the two religious communities to coexist.

It is the religion which determines nationality. They speak of a Turk who becomes Greek, or a Greek who becomes Turk. Greek means Christian - more precisely and very emphatically of the Greek Orthodox Church. Turk means Muhammedan. The Turkish speaking Cypriotes are passionately attached to Turkey and the Greek speaking Cypriotes passionately attached to Greece.

The central point in the present political problem of Cyprus is to be found in the Greek Orthodox religion and church. Everyone who reads the newspapers knows that its bishop and priests are leaders in the fight for ENOSIS - Union with Greece. But, there are reasons for this that lie at a deeper level than is generally supposed. The Orthodox Church which boasts that it is one of the oldest churches in Christendom, and that it was founded by the Apostle Paul in A.D. 45 carries on the Byzantine Empire's tradition. Awareness of this was intensified during the French and Roman Catholic rule of the Lusignan's. The foreign rulers tried to force their own religion upon the Cypriots, with Latin as Church language instead of Greek. Also a feudal system of Western pattern, and much else. The Orthodox Church grew all the stronger under this pressure because it represented all that was Greek, that is to say Byzantine, that which was ancient and had to be regarded as national. It was altogether natural that bishops and priests became leaders of the people in political matters. There is where Makarios gets his authority.

When the Turks drove out the Venetians in 1571, they were greeted as deliverers. Mohammedans and Orthodox Greeks joined in Oriental solidarity against the hated Westerners. The Turks re-instituted the freedom of the Orthodox Church, which fully approved when the Roman Catholic cathedrals in Nicosia and Famagusta were built into mosques. The role of the Church and the clergy in the Greek national movement and the ties of that movement with the Orthodox religion itself, have always had profound consequences.

But, what connection has all this with ENOSIS? - the demand for union with Greece? Cyprus certainly never belonged to Greece; modern Greece is very young, for it came into being in 1832 after being a part of the Ottoman Empire for about four centuries. Nevertheless, since that time union has been desired by Orthodox Cypriots and Greeks. Striving for Enosis has given the church new agitators even in the Turkish rule. When the English occupied the island in 1878, the Archbishop immediately demanded union with Greece, and this ideal has remained in the foreground throughout the British rule there. This holy duty has made every thought of an agreement impossible. How can that be explained? One must bear in mind that in this problem one must put aside all thought of the ancient Hellas and of the modern West's political ideas and realities. The Greece that the Greek-speaking population of Cyprus identifies itself is something different from the European kingdom of Hellas. It is the world of the Orthodox Church and that world as a historical reality and as an idea bears another name, that of the Byzantine Empire. European idealists who went to fight for the freedom of Hellas were shocked to meet Greeks who did not in the least remind them of Leonidas and Pericles. They were reminded of a different ideal. The word Romeos—the Romans—are Byzantine and that is what the Greek Church represents. That is what modern Greece is, heir of Byzantium, not of Athens.

The leaders of the Enosis movement have always been the high dignitaries of the church. A Cypriot Greek national movement in favor of secession from the British Empire and union with Greece declared itself with increasing force and parallel to this, a movement among the Turks for union with Turkey in case the British decided to leave. As long as Britain was powerful, the Greek government did not raise this question. The question did not become acute until the Greek government took it up in 1951. The year 1951 saw a change in the attitude of the Greek government; probably because the British power declined, the British Empire was in the process of liquidation and also largely owing to the fact that Greece was now receiving assistance from the U.S. and was no longer dependent on Britain. The Greek prime minister in a speech in the Chamber of deputies demanded the union of Cyprus with Greece and later raised the question at the U.N. Assembly and followed it up for five years.

In 1955 the movement entered into a new phase. Arms were smuggled into Cyprus on Greek ships and in April a terrorist orga-

nization called EOKA (National Organization of Cyprus Struggle) headed by a Greek officer came into action. There is conclusive evidence that Bishop Makarios is the leader of this terrorist organization responsible for killing some hundreds of British, Turks and Greeks. It imposes a secret oath on its members and even school children. Those who take the oath, are reported to have sworn to work with all their power for Enosis, never to reveal the organization and to be prepared to sacrifice even their life.

EOKA distributed leaflets which addressing the British, said: "You cannot exterminate us because we now number half a million. For each one of us who dies, ten British shall die".

EOKA turned its attention on the Turkish minority and in a leaflet dated May 15, 1956 addressing the Greeks, said: "Don't you know that you violate your religion and betray your fatherland by dealing with the Turks..... when water and fire become intimate friends and when hell and paradise unite than and only then shall we be friends of the Turks. You must remember that within three hours from the receipt of my letter, you must stop dealing with the Turks, otherwise I will order you executed" (signed EOKA leader Dighenis.) And this was no empty threat; because many executions were carried out on this order. It is significant that the assumed name Dighenis was the name of a Byzantine soldier and not Greek.

The Turkish government at the first stages of the Cyprus dispute held aloof out of regard to Greek friendship in the Balkan pact. But made it plain that it could not allow Cyprus to pass into Greek hands. If the status quo of the island were to change, because of its proximity to her shores - Cyprus is 40 miles from Turkey and 500 miles from Greece - and because of the large Turkish community, on the island, her rights must be protected.

First Greece declared herself outright for Enosis, that is union. Then she shied from pronouncing the word Enosis, because this project of annexation did not create sympathy at the U.N. What she said she wanted was the principle of self-determination applied to Cyprus as a whole. This would certainly have resulted in Enosis. Greece knew that. Then she shifted her position once more, demanding independence. But all these were tactical moves. The goal remained, Enosis-union. To have an independent Cyprus there must be a Cypriot nation, which there is not. There are two communities; one wishing to unite with Greece, the other with Turkey.

The Turkish view was that if the principle of self-determination is to be applied at all, it should be applied to the two communities separately. This would result in the partition of the island into two-one part would be united with Greece, the other part with Turkey. True, there is no marked line which divides the two communities. But, the Turkish view was that if a partition was made, and a long period of option given the communities to emigrate, an exchange of population would take place and the problem would be solved. An exchange of Greek and Turkish populations on a much larger scale, involving two million persons, was made any way some 40 years ago.

Turkey definitely refused the independence project also. The President of Turkey in reviewing the Cyprus question in a speech he delivered then, made the Turkish point of view clear when he said: "There can be no question of Turkey's assenting to any solution which would place the Turks of Cyprus under the domination of the Greek government or the Greek community, in any form whatsoever." The Turkish view remained partition, the Greek view -Enosis-that is annexation. Furthermore the Greek government refused to recognize that Turkey might have any interest at all in the Cyprus question.

A third alternative to Enosis, the Greek view, and partition, the Turkish view, was put forward by the British government. It was a plan for an interim period of seven years, based upon co-operation with Turkey and Greece in the administration of Cyprus. According to this plan, two separate assemblies were to be established by way of free elections to deal with matters that concern the two communities. A council which would include Turkish and Greek ministers, to be elected from among the members of the assemblies, would operate as the executive organ headed by the governor. At the same time, Greek and Turkish government were each to appoint a representative for constant contact and consultation with the governor to safeguard the rights of their respective communities. It really was meant to postpone final solution for a period of seven years. During this time, it was hoped, that more favorable conditions would develop to discuss what the ultimate destiny of the island was to be. Turkey accepted this project and appointed her representative. Greece refused to collaborate and this refusal made the implementation of the British project impossible.

However, early in 1958 the whole picture changed. All three parties came to an understanding. The Turkish and Greek prime ministers met in Zurich, Switzerland and agreed that Cyprus should be an independent republic. Greece gave up the idea of annexing Cyprus, Turkey the idea of partitioning and Britain the idea of ruling in partnership with Turkey and Greece. They agreed and it was supplemented by a second agreement in London that there should be an independent Cyprus and this independence be guaranteed by Britain, Turkey and Greece. Britain was to continue to maintain her airbases on Cyprus. That is what she cared for most anyway.

At subsequent meetings of legal experts of all the parties concerned, the constitution of the Republic of Cyprus was drafted, with safeguards for the Turkish community. This constitution became a part of the diplomatic compromise of Zurich and London and was also guaranteed by Turkey, Greece and Great Britain. According to the Treaty of Guarantee, *"in so far as common or concerted action may not be possible, each of the guaranteeing powers reserves the right to take action with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs created by the present treaty."* (Art.4) The leaders of both communities signed all three documents. The constitution was finally promulgated and Cyprus began its independent life in August 1960. Makarios became its president, Dr. Fazıl Küçük, its vice president.

The question of Cyprus between Turkey, Greece and Great Britain seemed to have been solved. It was a great relief. But soon disillusionment began to set in. It gradually became apparent that Makarios was not disposed to implement the provisions of the constitution laboriously prepared. He did everything to evade the implementation of articles which guaranteed minority rights. He acted unconstitutionally by ignoring to consult the vice president in matters of foreign policy.

Finally he declared his intention to change the constitution of Cyprus and abrogate the Treaty of Guarantee and in December 1963, a massacre of the Turkish population by EOKA began. This decision opened the Cyprus question again in a much more acute form. Makarios now claims that what he wants is an independent Cyprus without guarantees. But this project was refused in negotiations prior to Zurich and London agreements, as it was obvious that it would be a step toward ENOSIS, which certainly is still the ultimate goal of the Greek community of Cyprus and of Greece.

Greece and the Greek community now seem to have gone back to their old idea of ENOSIS. Turkey, finding physical partition difficult, has suggested some form of Federal system, which would allow the two communities to co-exist and at the same time safeguard community rights. This seems to be the most practical solution for the problem of Cyprus provided Greece gives up the dream of ENOSIS, insistence of the realization of which, might well destroy NATO.