

The history of Cyprus

An overview



Seminar contribution to the module "Terrestrial Ecosystems" (2101-230)
Institute of Botany (210a) · University of Hohenheim · Stuttgart
presented by Dominik de Frenne on January 21, 2019

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Introduction

The history of Cyprus is defined by many foreign rules, because of its strategically important position in the Mediterranean Sea.

Cyprus was crucial for the trade between the Orient and the West.

Therefore there is a big mixture of cultures in Cyprus.



Map of Cyprus and surrounded countries of the Levant region:
1 Turkey, 2 Syria, 3 Cyprus, 4 Egypt, 5 Israel, 6 Greece, 7 Lebanon
[1].

Stone Age – Bronze Age

In the 9th millennium BC the first humans came to Cyprus. With their arrival the extinction of the dwarf elephants and the dwarf hippos followed.

Around 7000 BC new settlers from Anatolia came to Cyprus and they brought emmer, wheat, einkorn, sheep, red deer, cattle and goats with them.

This was the start of agriculture in Cyprus. The new settlers lived in round houses, under which they buried their dead.

Between 1900 and 1650 BC settlers brought the bronze production to Cyprus and started trading with coastal towns in Syria. The trades with the West was less significant.

From 1650 to 1050 BC Cyprus started to open to the Greek cultural area as a consequence of many settlers coming from Greece.



Reconstruction of a typical round houses of the settlers, from the Stone Age, in Cyprus [2].

8000 – 1050 BC

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City Kingdoms

Cyprus had 12 city kingdoms, but the rule of the island changed many times.

In about 950 BC the Phoenicians conquered Cyprus and made them a part of their trading base in the Mediterranean Sea.

In 709 BC the Assyrians captured Cyprus.

In 560 BC Cyprus got conquered by the Egyptians.



Location of the city kingdoms in Cyprus [3].

The Kings of Cyprus joined the Persian Empire in 540 BC, until 331 BC Cyprus aligned with Alexander the Great and became part of his empire.

1050 – 350 BC

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Hellenistic Empire

With the death of Alexander the Great, his entourage fought for Cyprus and after a war against the lords of Cyprus in 294 BC the Ptolemy ruled Cyprus.

The Hellenistic time was characterized by a lot of trade with Egypt. Cyprus exported wine, grains and textiles. Their ship engineers were in high demand at that time.

Cyprus was an important interstation in the trade between the East and the West.

During the Hellenistic Empire Greek became the main language in Cyprus.

The architecture and art was greatly influenced by Alexandria.



Mosaic of the Greek god Apollon in Pafos (Cyprus) is an early certificate of the Greek culture on Cyprus [4].

350 – 58 BC 0

Roman Empire

After the Roman Empire conquered Syria, they the next targeted Cyprus.

The roman conquerors exploited Cyprus, taxes were very high, but not all the money was collected for the state, many people took the tax money for themselves.

After two returns to Egypt, Cyprus was finally part of the Roman Empire in 39 BC.

The Apostles Paulus and Barnabas preached in the year 45 of the lord in Cyprus.

With the progression of Christianity many heathen temples were closed.

With the fall of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, Cyprus became a part of Byzantium.



Map of the boundaries of the western (green) and eastern (red) Roman empires after the death of Theodosius I, in 395 AD. The East became part of the Byzantine Empire [5].

58 BC – 395 AD 0



Byzantine Empire

At the time the patriarch churches of Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch ruled everything, but the orthodox church of Cyprus became the first independent church. That's why they could appoint priests by themselves.

Cyprus was in the center of the conflict between the Arabs and the Byzantines, they paid taxes to both sides, but however they got looted often. Therefore many castles arose in the Beşparmak mountains.

Finally, in 965 AD the fighting ended, which led to stronger trade.

1184 Isaak Komnenos, a Byzantine prince, was crowned emperor of Cyprus by the bishop of Cyprus. This led to the first independence of Cyprus.



The Saint Hilarion castle in the Beşparmak mountains to protect the population. Got renovated 200 years later by the Lusignans [6].

0 395 – 1192 AD

Rule of the Lusignans

The crusader ship of Richard Lionhearts concubine sank in 1191 in front of Cyprus. To rescue his loved woman, he conquered Cyprus and married her. Because Richard Lionheart wanted to continue his crusade, he sold the island to his crusaders.

In 1192 the crusaders sold the island to the Franconian house of Lusignan. With the papal permission they obtained the island as feud and they built up their monarchy.

Cyprus came to hold an important position in the crusade and the Roman Catholic creed was introduced as the binding religion, which the mostly orthodox people of Cyprus didn't like but had to follow.



The map shows the Near East in 1190, where the crusade took place [7].

0 1192 – 1489 AD

Rule of the Lusignans

The population of Cyprus had to pay fees to the king, the pope and the nobility; they were exploited by their rulers.

During their nearly 300 years rule, the Lusignans built many churches and cathedrals on Cyprus, for example the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Nicosia or the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Famagusta.

The reign of the Lusignans ended in 1468 when king Jakob II married to a Venetian patrician daughter called Catarina Conaro and died of malaria six months later. One year after him, his son died.

In 1489 Catarina Conaro got forced to give up the throne and gave it, for lack of children, to Venice.



Former Cathedral of St. Sophia, built by the Lusignans in Nicosia, now known as Selimiye Mosque [8], © A. Savin.

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1192 – 1489 AD

Rule of Venice

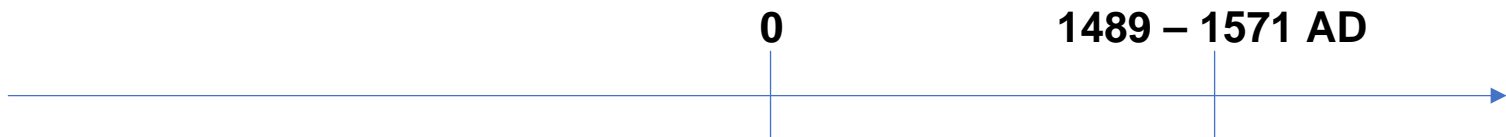
For Venice Cyprus was an important station for its military and commerce, so they built many fortifications in Nicosia, Kyrenia and Famagusta.

The funding of the buildings was enabled through high taxes for lords and even higher taxes for the people.

Venice had the problem that Portugal and Spain were on the rise in trading on sea.

These fortifications and good diplomacy were the reasons why Venice could guard Cyprus a long time from the Ottoman Empire.

But in the end the Ottomans drove out the Venetians from Cyprus.



Ottoman Empire

With the Ottoman rule the cathedrals of Nicosia and Famagusta changed into mosques.

Cyprus was given the right to autonomy and relative freedom.

The orthodox archbishop was granted more rights, for example he was able to requisition taxes.

1754 the bishops got acknowledged as the ambassadors of the Greek population, this was the beginning of the bishop rule. But the rule of the bishops didn't change anything in terms of the living conditions of the population, that's the reason why, at the end of the 18. Century, the fight between the upper and the lower class broke out.



Lala Mustafa Pascha Mosque was, before the Ottomans came, the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Famagusta, built by the Lusignans [9].

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1571 – 1887 AD

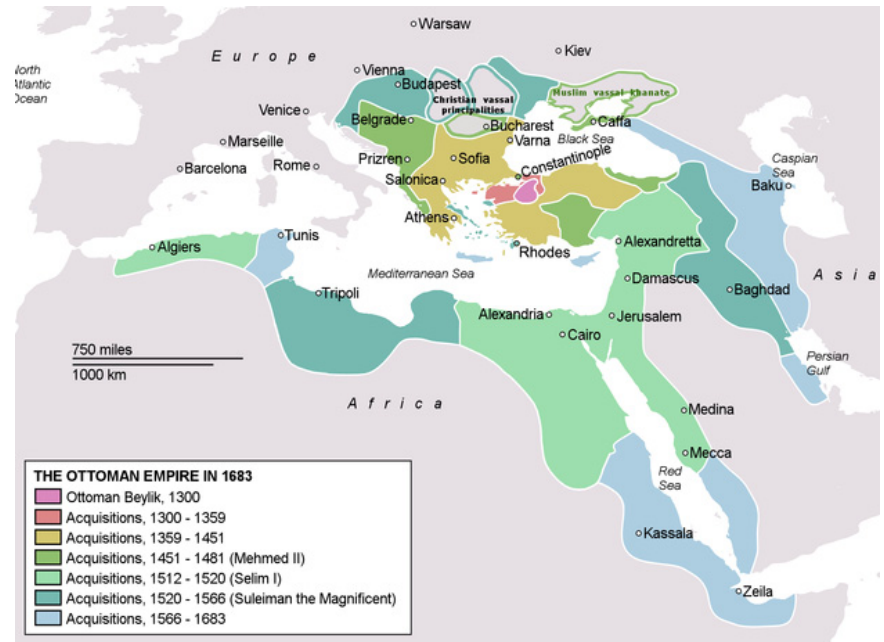
Ottoman Empire

In 1821 the Greek war on freedom took place, a secret society asked the bishops for assistance, but the Ottomans interfered and hung the bishops. That was the end of the bishop rule in Cyprus.

This was followed by a big massacre of the Greek population on Cyprus and opened a huge gap between the Greek and Turkish population.

However, the loss of power of the Ottoman Empire couldn't be stopped.

When the British Empire promised to help in the war against Russia, they got Cyprus as tradeoff.



Map of the Ottoman Empire at its greatest expand in 1683, with the steps of conquest [10].

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1571 – 1887 AD

British Empire

The Britons appointed a high commissariat to rule the island, but they kept the Turkish administration, which caused fundamental problems.

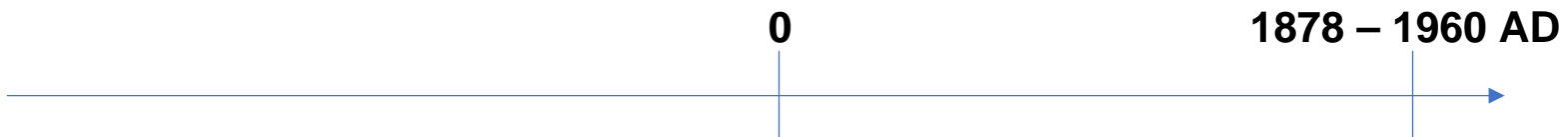
The Greek orthodox population and the orthodox church demanded the connection to Greece, that thought was named Enosis (= unity), but the Britons refused that because of their strategical and economic interests. Cyprus was an important stop on the travel to India.

In 1914 Cyprus got annexed by the British Empire and 1925 declared as a British Crown Colony.

In the 1930th many riots against the Britons followed, but they didn't want to give up Cyprus, despite of the attempt to give up all their colonies all around the world.

In 1943 the Britons introduced the democracy in Cyprus, they had the right to found parties and to carry out council elections.

The fight of the Greek population for the Enosis started in 1955 with the foundation of the military secret organization EOKA. This was the reason why the Turkish Cypriots founded the TMT and demanded to split the country corresponding to the ethnic share of the population.

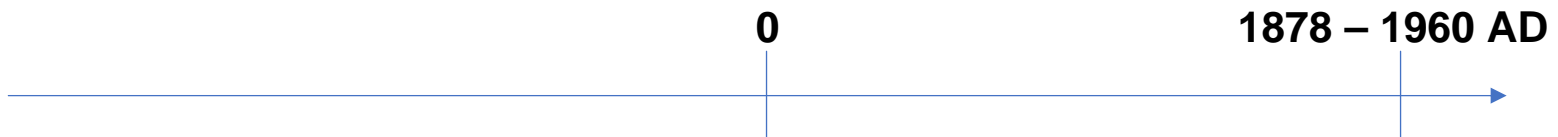


British Empire

After hundreds of victims, Greece, Turkey and Great Britain reached an agreement with the London convention, which proclaimed Cyprus as a republic.

Greece and Turkey were given the right to interfere, when the sovereignty was endangered, Great Britain received two extraterritorial military bases.

The situation on Cyprus didn't relax after its independence, the Turkish population lived poorly und got controlled by the Greek Cypriots.



Republic of Cyprus

Makarios, a Greek Cypriot, was elected as the first president of the Republic of Cyprus, the Turk Cypriot Küçük was his vice president.

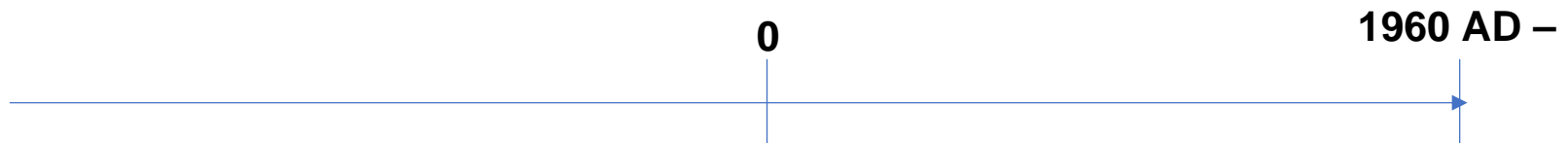
In the case of legislative decisions, the constitution said that there must be a majority by both populations, the Greek and the Turkish.

Dissatisfaction in parts of the Greek Cypriots and difficulties with the implementation of the constitution reanimated the idea of the Enosis and the pressure rose.

When Makarios tried to change the constitution in favor of the Greek population in 1963, the situation turned violent. The Turkish Cypriots didn't feel safe anymore and retreated in an enclave.

Until 1964 the troops of the United Nations separated the both populations in Nicosia along the green line.

In 1974 Right-wing nationalists and the military dictatorship in Athena leagued against Makarios and accused him of selling out the Enosis-thought. After a failed coup against Makarios, carried out by Greek officers, he flew abroad.

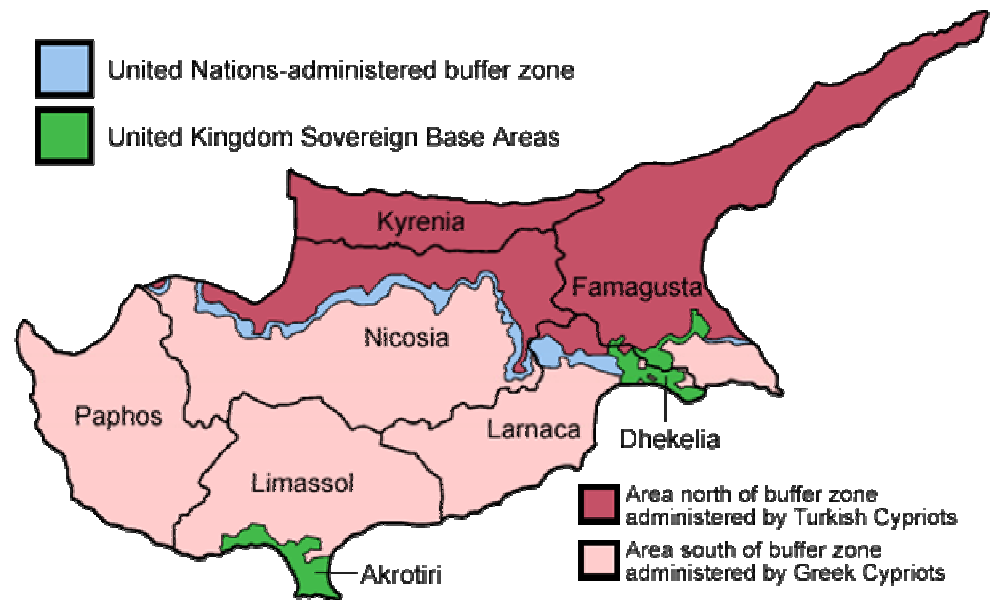


Republic of Cyprus

A few days after that, Turkish troops invaded the north of Cyprus and relied on their right to interfere, as stated in the London convention.

The exchange of population ended in 1975, the Turkish Cypriots held the northern area, the Greek Cypriots the south.

On the Greek side Makarios returned from abroad and on the Turkish side Denktas was elected as president.



Map of Cyprus today. The Turkish side in the north and the Greek side in the south, separated with the green line, the United Nations-administered buffer zone and two British military bases [11].

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1960 AD –

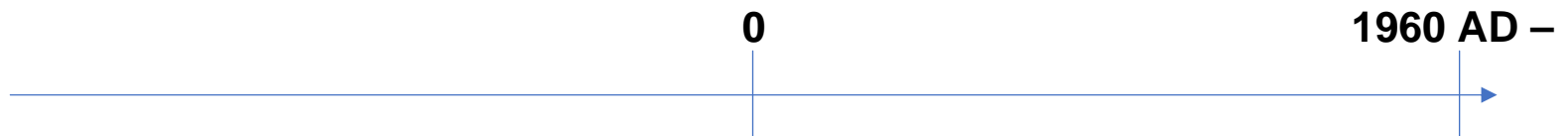
Republic of Cyprus

1977 Denktaş and Makarios reached an agreement on a basis for more negotiations regarding the future of Cyprus, but Makarios died during this time and the basis broke down.

After the failure of the negotiations the "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus" was proclaimed in 1983, but only the Greek Cypriot part of the island was international acknowledged as the "Republic of Cyprus " which is a part of the EU since 2004.

Since 2003 the border between north and south of Cyprus was opened.

The negotiations to reunite the island are still running.



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Illustrations

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