Historical Brief

The history of Cyprus is one of the oldest recorded in the world and its historical significance is disproportionate to its small size. Considerable resources of copper and timber found in the island combined to make it a highly desirable territorial acquisition.

The first signs of civilisation date to the ninth millennium B.C., but it was the discovery of copper (3900 – 2500 B.C.) that was to bring trade and wealth to the island. Around 1200 B.C., a process began that was to largely stamp the island with the national identity that it maintains to this day. The arrival of Mycenaean-Achaean Greeks as permanent settlers introduced their language and culture to Cyprus which, though subsequently subjugated by various conquerors; retained its Greek identity. The Turkish Cypriots came much later and were mostly the descendants of the Ottoman Turks, who occupied the island for more than three hundred years (1571-1878). They have contributed their own heritage to the country, which is still visible in Ottoman monuments scattered around the island.

Christianity was introduced to Cyprus during the first century A.D. by St. Paul and St. Barnabas, founder of the Church of Cyprus.

Neolithic Period (8200 – 3900 B.C.)

Remains of the oldest known settlements in Cyprus date from this period. They can best be seen at Choirokoitia, just off

the Nicosia to Limassol motorway. At first, only stone vessels were used. Pottery appeared in a second phase after 5000 B.C.

Chalcolithic Age (3900 — 2500 B.C.)

A transitional period between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age. Most Chalcolithic settlements were found in western Cyprus where a fertility cult developed. Copper was discovered and was beginning to be exploited on a small scale.

Bronze Age (2500 — 1050 B.C.)

Copper was more extensively exploited bringing wealth to Cyprus. Trade developed with the Near East, Egypt and the Aegean where Cyprus was known under the name of Alasia. After 1400 B.C., Mycenaeans from Greece began to come to the island as merchants. Around 1200 B.C., of Achaean Greeks came massively to settle on the island and established the first city-kingdoms of Pafos, Salamis, Kition and Kourion. The Hellenization of the island was in process.

Geometric Period (1050 — 750 B.C.)

Cyprus had ten Greek city-kingdoms. The cult of Aphrodite flourished, and Phoenicians settled at Kition in the ninth century B.C. The eighth century B.C. was a period of great prosperity.

Archaic and Classical Period (750 – 310 B.C.)

Despite being conquered by many invaders Cyprus continued to prosper. Cypriot kingdoms were ruled by a succession of foreign invaders: after the Assyrians came the Egyptians and then the Persians. King Evagoras of Salamis (who ruled from 411-374 B.C.) unified Cyprus and made the island one of the leading political and cultural centres of the Greek world. The city-kingdoms of Cyprus welcomed Alexander the Great, King of Macedonia, and Cyprus became part of his empire.

Hellenistic Period (310 – 30 B.C.)

After the rivalries for succession amongst Alexander's generals, Cyprus eventually came under the Hellenistic state of the Ptolemies of Egypt and from then on was part of the Greek Alexandrine world. The Ptolemies abolished the city-kingdoms and unified Cyprus. Pafos became the capital.

Roman Period (30B.C. – 330 A.D.)

Cyprus came under the dominion of the Roman Empire. During the missionary journey of Apostles Paul and Barnabas, the Proconsul Sergius Paulus was converted to Christianity, making Cyprus the first country to be governed by a Christian. Destructive earthquakes occurred during the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. and cities needed to be rebuilt.

Byzantine Period (330 – 1191 A.D.)

After the division of the Roman Empire in two parts, Cyprus came under the Eastern Roman Empire, subsequently known as Byzantium, with Constantinople as its capital. Christianity became the official religion. New earthquakes during the fourth century A.D. completely destroyed the main cities of the Island. Once again, new cities arose. Constantia, built near the site of ancient Salamis, became the capital. In 488 Emperor Zeno granted the Church of Cyprus full autonomy and gave the archbishop the privileges of holding a scepter instead of a pastoral staff, wearing a purple mantle and signing in red ink. After an initial invasion by the Arabs in 647, the island was for three centuries under constant attacks by Arab invaders as well as pirates until 965, when Emperor Nicephoros Phocas expelled the Arabs from Asia Minor and Cyprus.

Richard the Lionheart and the Knights Templar (1191 – 1192)

Isaac Comnenus, a Byzantine governor and self-proclaimed emperor of Cyprus, behaved discourteously toward survivors of a shipwreck involving ships of King Richard's fleet on their way to the Holy Lands during the Third Crusade. Among the survivors were Richard's sister Joanna, Queen of Sicily, and his betrothed Berengaria of Navarre. Richard in revenge fought Isaac, defeated him, took possession of Cyprus and married Berengaria of Navarre at Kolossi Castle in Limasol, where she was crowned Queen of England. A year later, Richard sold the island for 100 000 dinars to the Knights Templar, a Frankish military order, who resold it at the same price to Guy de Lusignan, deposed King of Jerusalem.

Frankish (Lusignan) Period (1192 — 1489)

Cyprus became a Frankish Kingdom and was ruled on the feudal system. The Catholic Church officially replaced the Greek Orthodox, which albeit under severe suppression, managed to survive. The city of Ammochostos was then one of the richest in the Near East. It was during this period that the historical names of Lefkosia, Ammochostos and Lemesos were changed to Nicosia, Famagusta and Limassol, respectively. The era of the Lusignan dynasty ended when Queen Catherine Cornaro ceded Cyprus to Venice in 1489.

Venetian Period (1489 — 1571)

Venetians viewed Cyprus as the last bastion of Christianity against the Ottomans in the Eastern Mediterranean and fortified the island, tearing down lovely buildings in Nicosia to reduce the boundaries of the city within fortified walls. They also built impressive walls around Ammochostos which were considered at the time to be state of the art military architecture.

Ottoman Occupation (1571 — 1878)

In 1570 Ottoman troops attacked Cyprus, captured Nicosia, slaughtered twenty thousand people and laid siege to Ammochostos for a year. After a brave defence by Venetian commander Marc Antonio Bragadino, Ammochostos fell to Lala Mustafa Pasha, who at first allowed the besieged a peaceful exodus, but later ordered the flaying of Bragadino. On

annexation to the Ottoman Empire, Lala Mustafa Pasha became the first governor. The Ottoman Turks, whose descendants together with the descendants converts from the Christian inhabitants of Cyprus form today the largest part of the Turkish Cypriot community, were to rule Cyprus until 1878. During the Ottoman period, the Muslim minority acquired a Cypriot identity. As the power of the Ottoman Turks declined, their rule became increasingly corrupt. In many instances Greek and Turkish Cypriots struggled together against oppressive of Ottoman rule.

British Rule (1878 – 1960)

Under the 1878 Cyprus Convention, part of the Treaty of Berlin (1878), the Ottoman Turks handed over the administration of the island to Britain in exchange for guarantees that Britain would protect the crumbling Ottoman Empire against possible Russian aggression. It remained formally part of the Ottoman Empire until the latter entered World War I on the side of Germany, and Britain annexed the island in 1914. In 1923 under the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey relinquished all rights to Cyprus, which in 1925 was declared a Crown colony. Hopes for self-determination in the post-war period which in the minds of the Greek Cypriot inhabitants who made more than 80% of the population was at the time synonymous with Union with Greece, were shattered by the British, who considered the island vitally strategic, especially after the debacle of Suez in 1956. In addition Ankara was averse to having a Greek island so close to its southern border.

After all peaceful means to achieve freedom had been exhausted, a national liberation struggle was launched in 1955 against colonial rule and for union with Greece. The

liberation struggle ended in 1959 with the Zurich-London Agreements signed by Britain, Greece and Turkey as well as representatives of the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, leading to Cyprus' independence.