



The Cyprus Issue Project

March 28, 2014

The Historical Background: From Antiquity to the Berlin Congress (1878)

Vasileios P. Karakasis

Happy the country that has no history

Anonymous

Before developing historical narratives that have mainly captured the essence of the Cyprus Issue, a question, frequently popping up in our heads, is: why are we particularly concerned with what has happened years or even centuries ago? Why should we care about events in the past while facing challenges in the present? There is a clear-cut answer to that: **history is inescapable** (Corfield 2008). History examines the past along with the legacies of the past that are inherited in the present. Rather than treating history as a dead subject, we should comprehend it as a living process, as a continuous path dependence, that links developments throughout centuries and encourages readers –as well as policy-makers- to concentrate on such linkages and their influence in the present and the future (ibid). Underlining George Orwell's *1984* quote, "he who controls the past, controls the future".

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Aim of Report No. 6 is to present a background on the domestic and the international setting of the conflict in Cyprus. To this effect, emphasis will be laid on the historical – both internal and external- origins of the conflict. In doing so, readers might be able to grasp the seeds that, according to the author's opinion, have contributed to the generation, “the maintenance and the reinforcement of ethnic cleavages in the bi-communal society of the island” (Joseph 2009; 376)¹. This report seeks to embark upon this journey throughout Cyprus' history and aims to cover -to the extent this is feasible- the period starting from antiquity to the Berlin Congress in 1878, when Cyprus was ceded by the Ottoman Empire to the British. The text consists of three parts:

I. the first one, through Timelines 1 and 2, will briefly relate the developments on the island in different historical segments, starting from the Neolithic period and concluding in 1878, when the Ottoman rule on the island came to a *de facto* end

II. the second one will focus on the reasons why the Ottomans had to “rent” the island to England. In this context, I will try to present the considerations on Cyprus’ destiny as a piece of the Near Eastern jigsaw puzzle in the outset of the 19th century; the Near Eastern Crisis has absorbed the European attention during the entire century. Light will also be cast

¹ As regards the other communities, a forthcoming report will focus on the forging of their own identities.

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on the diplomatic “poker game” between the Great Powers on the “sick body” of the Ottoman Empire.

At a first glance, readers might find the cynic 19th century European diplomacy-towards what was happening in and with respect to the destiny of the Ottoman Empire- irrelevant to the Cyprus Issue. These were, more or less, the initial preoccupations in the beginning of the present research. Nevertheless, dealing with the British insertion into the “Cyprus equation”, these thoughts proved wrong to me. The motivation of the British to engage themselves in Cyprus might not be solely rooted in some general geopolitical considerations as many could claim (supervising the “choke points” and the routes leading to India in order to protect their “vested interests”).

Thucydides’ diachronic assumption, according to which states’ behavior -human nature alike- is motivated firstly by fear (*φόβος*), secondly by self-interest (*κέρδος*) and thirdly by honor (*δόξα*), seemed to be more appropriate in the effort to better identify some basic British concerns vis-à-vis Cyprus. The first “Thucydidean stimulant” that has probably prompted the British entanglement with the Cypriot imbroglio was England’s fear of the Russian expansion in the Ottoman territories. This fear has been perceived as a main jeopardy for the British “vested interests” on the road to India and the “balance of power” in Europe. In order to properly understand this “British fear”, the *a priori* acquaintance of a

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wider picture - the diplomatic interaction of the Great Powers during the 19th century-seemed to me the appropriate prerequisite. I believe that this can be a useful step to better grasp the “operational code” behind British engagement with the island’s affairs.

III. Returning from the international to the island’s domestic realm, the third part will delineate the ideological zymosis that unfolded, mainly, in both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides during that period. Thus, readers may hopefully gain an additional insight on the influence exerted by the “ideological forces” on the relations between their respective identities².

PART I: From antiquity to the British administration

A. Cyprus throughout the ancient world

Many tourist guides assign the catchy title “the island of Aphrodite” to Cyprus. According to Hesiod, Aphrodite was born out of the sea foam when Uranus was cut by a sickle and fell into the sea after attack by his son, Cronus. The water started bubbling and foaming in the spot where Uranus had plunged into the sea. Suddenly, the most beautiful maiden emerged from the foam and appeared on the surface. At first the waves gently carried her toward the Greek island Cythera, but with the help of Zephyrus, the western wind, the waves guided her to the shores of Paphos.

² See footnote 1

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Leaving mythology aside, the geographical characteristics of the island, depicted in [Report No. 3](#), have been a key(not a determinant though) variable in formulating the island's fate. As Alan James (2002; 3) stresses, "throughout recorded time, its political experience has reflected the interlocking impact of two utterly basic geographic factors: size and location. With respect to the second one and being situated between Egypt, Syria and Anatolia (present Turkey), this place has witnessed the invasion, the establishment and the interaction of all the ancient civilizations of pre-history and proto-history projecting it into a "crossroad of civilizations". It "has been always a place of meeting" (Smithsonian National Museum; words of Mr. Hadjisavvas, Department of Antiquities) since different people of various cultures, used to meet on Cyprus for a common purpose: to get the copper³. That is why Cyprus was labelled as the *El Dorado of antiquity* and the "Melting Pot of Cultures" that have left their imprints on the island. Timeline 1 and Timeline 2 briefly describe these cultural experiences the island has gone through the Ancient Ages, the Hellenistic, the Roman, the Byzantine and the Ottoman Era.

³ According to George Dossin, the etymology of the word Cyprus should be attributed to the Sumerian word *zubar* which means copper or *kubar*which means bronze. Greeks raise different interpretations. The etymology might be either rooted in the ancient Greek King Kypros or the Greek word for Mediterranean cypress tree (*Cupressus sempervirens-κυπάρισσος*)

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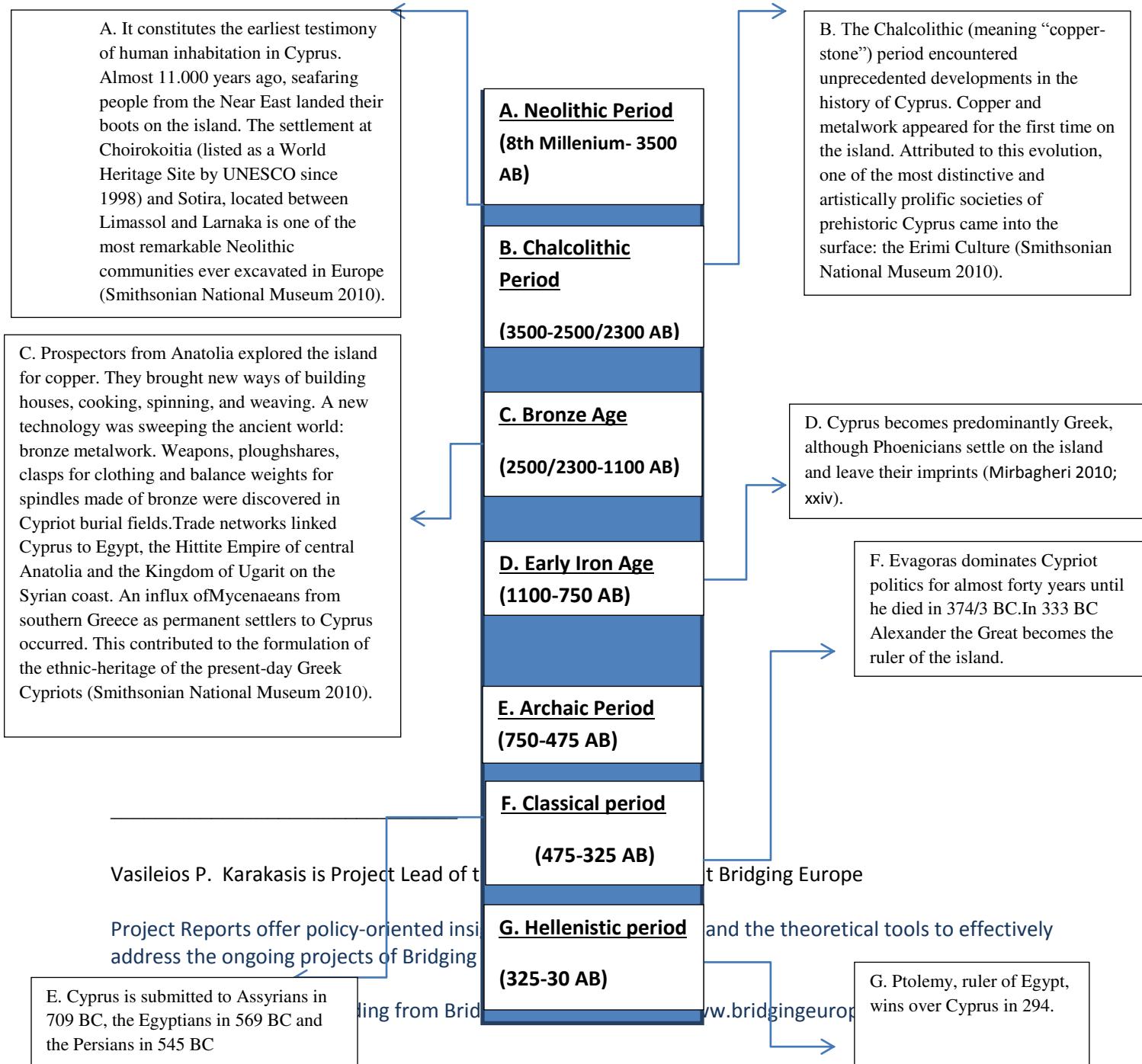
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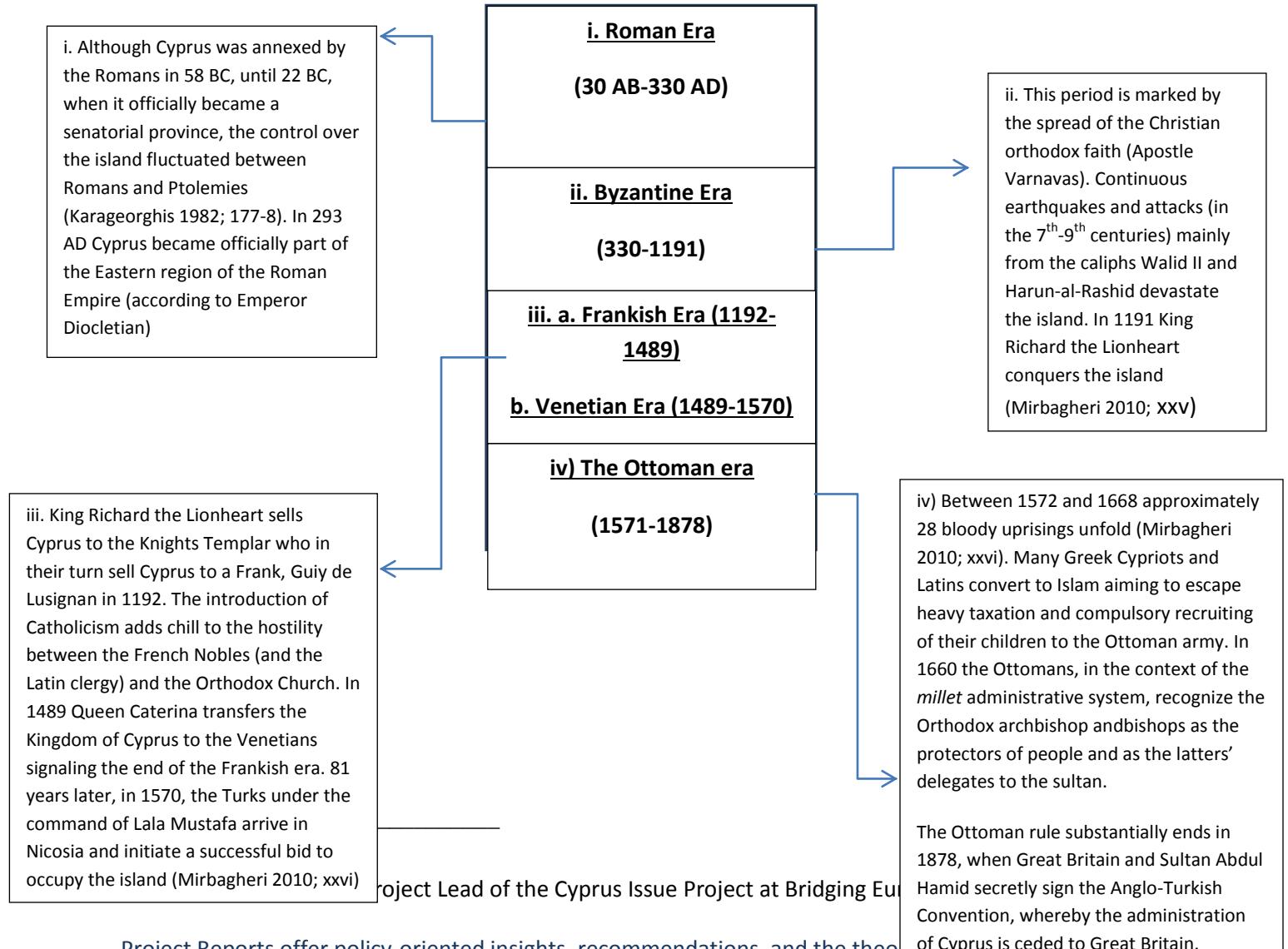
Timeline 1: Cyprus throughout the Ancient World



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B. Timeline 2: From the Roman to the Ottoman Era



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PART II

The Near Eastern Question beyond the Cyprus issue: “unwrapping” the diplomatic poker game in the 19th century

i) Briefly delineating the Eastern Question in the 19th century

The reason why the Ottomans ceded the island to the British merits further examination for the sake of our future analysis. To this end, this part integrates the Cyprus issue into the wider Eastern Question of the 19th century; otherwise, the understanding of the rationale behind England’s involvement in Cyprus would be elliptic.

Throughout the 19th century, the (Near) Eastern Question has been the problem concerning the Ottoman Empire’s fate. The Turks, almost two centuries ago, “had threatened to overcome all Europe, but this threat for the Europeans was checked during the 17th century”, mainly by Habsburg resistance (Carrie 1967; 40). Things became stabilized for a time, roughly along the Danube boundary, and the Turks, besides their possessions over the entire Near East, remained established in the European Balkans (*ibid*). The Ottoman Empire remained extraneous to the Napoleonic upheavals that closed in 1815. Nevertheless, Christian grievances against the ruling Ottomans and nationalistic sentiments in the Balkans calling for state-independence from the Ottoman Empire

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furnished occasion for specific developments, crises and wars as well as diplomatic activities on behalf of the Great Powers (*ibid.*). This could briefly describe the substance of the Eastern Question during that period. The onset of the 19th century found four powers with definite interests in the Ottoman Empire and its fate: Russia⁴, Austria⁵, France(because of Napoleon⁶) and Britain⁷.

ii) The Crimean War (1853-1856) and its repercussions

In 1850s the problem of the fate of the Ottoman Empire, had, once again, absorbed the attention of Europe. Although the status of the whole Near East was regulated in 1840 (with a convention ending the Egyptian-Ottoman war), the efforts of the Ottoman Empire to revive itself had not -in its entirety at least- been successful.

In a private discussion with Seymour George Hamilton, the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg, in the years immediately preceding the Crimean War, Tsar Nicholas had

⁴ The 1774 the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainardji had marked an important step along the Russian road towards the Straits. This treaty had provided Russia with control of lands north of the Black Sea and recognized her right to the protection of some churches in Constantinople (Carrier 1967; 40).

⁵ Austria had a diachronic interest in the Balkans' region

⁶ Napoleon, before his defeat, sought to conquer Egypt. Although he faced an abortive experience, this development manifested French interest in the Near East for the later extension of which it also laid further bases.

⁷ The Napoleonic episode in Egypt, as mentioned in the previous footnote, had raised the British awareness on the importance of the Eastern Mediterranean. That is one of the reasons for Britain's retaining the bases of the Ionian Islands in 1815.

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reportedly said the following: "Turkey seems to be falling to pieces; the fall will be a great misfortune. It is very important that England and Russia should come to perfectly good understanding... and that neither should take any decisive step of which the other is not apprized... 'We have a Sick Manon our hands, a man gravely ill, it will be a great misfortune if one of these days he slips through our hands, especially before the necessary arrangements are made' (Temperley 1936; 272). Tsar was implying the need to intensively intervene in the Ottoman affairs. Although Britain did not accept this proposal, she did not flatly reject them. This ambiguous position enabled Prince Menshikov, the Russian Representative at the Porte, to claim a standing right of intervention in the Ottoman affairs, aiming to protect all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman territory when the occasion would seem suitable (Carrie 1967; 85).

The pretext for an increasing Russian intervention in the Ottoman affairs was given by an episode in Jerusalem known as "a quarrel of monks"⁸. Napoleon III reacted by sending a

⁸The major point in that dispute was "whether the Greek Orthodox should continue to exclusively possess the keys to the main door of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, on the spot where Jesus was born and cradled in the manger. On the other side, the Latins had their own keys, but they were to a side door and not to the main door" (Cavendish 2004; 55). There was also a row about a silver star with Latin inscriptions in the sanctuary, which had mysteriously disappeared in 1847, as well as disputes over the Latin claim to the right to repair the principal cupola of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and over the right to officiate at the Tomb of the Virgin Mary at Gethsemane. This dispute was further escalated to a point where Greek and Latin monks came to blows with crosses and candlesticks in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre" (*ibid.*)

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ship, *Charlemagne*, to the Black Sea to defend France's support to the Latin claims in the dispute. This, accompanied by aggressive diplomatic and financial inducements, sharpened the minds of Ottoman leaders, who declared in favor of France (*ibid.*). Russia responded by invading the Ottoman-controlled territories of Moldavia and Wallachia (roughly, parts of modern day Moldova and Romania) and sinking the Ottoman fleet at the Battle of Sinope in 1853. That inflamed public opinion in Britain and France, which feared that "Russian domination in the Black Sea region would threaten their trade routes to India via Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean" (*Economist* 18.3.2014). Britain and France, having concluded a formal alliance, declared war against Russia at the end of March 1854. The issue at stake was Britain's feeling that she should not allow certain Russian encroachments-with France somewhat half-heartedly joining, mainly because she felt urged not to allow Britain to oppose Russia on her own (Carrie 1967; 89).

After the declaration of war, the question was to find a battleground. With the diplomatic contribution of Austria, the allies decided to carry the war to Crimea. Through operating under the handicap of extended overseas lines of communications, they managed to best the Russians on their home ground (*ibid.*). Regardless of the war's outcome, "the Crimean War led to the dissolution of the Metternich order⁹ that was so painstakingly forged at the

⁹ That will be also analyzed in a forthcoming report.

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Congress of Vienna and signaled the disintegration of unity among the European Monarchs" (Kissinger 1994; 79).

In the aftermath of the Crimean War in the mid-1850s and under the provisions of the Treaty of Paris that was signed in March 1856, the Black Sea was closed to warships of all nations, except for small vessels to effectively protect the coasts. It had ceased to be an Ottoman "neutral" lake (Hale 2013; 20). The actors involved in that Treaty (England, France, Austria, Russia and the Ottoman Empire) agreed to respect the independence and the integrity of the Ottoman Empire under certain conditions¹⁰. Under this treaty, the Ottoman government was also invited to participate in the 'public law and concert' of Europe' (Hale 2013; 20). In the eyes of the Ottoman administration, this evolution had a considerable significance, since it signaled the recognition of the Empire's status as a European power (which was not the case before).

iii) The road to the Berlin Congress 1878

This status quo, nevertheless, was never accepted by the Russians who were waiting for the "ripe moment" to revise it. Almost 20 years later this moment arrived. How did this happen? Prussia needed Russia's support in its efforts to unite Germany. Chancellor Otto

¹⁰ These conditions are reflected in the HattiHumayun (February 1856). The Ottoman Empire was entitled to guarantee the protection of the Christian subjects living within her territories.

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Von Bismarck, who had long been striving for this objective with “iron and blood”, had sent negotiators to St. Petersburg. His message to Russia was that Prussia would support any talks around the issue of lifting the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the Black Sea, in case Russia stayed neutral during Germany’s unification process (Prodan). The two wars waged again Austria and France, in 1866 and 1870 respectively, ended up with a Prussian victory.

Russia, and more specifically her foreign minister Gorchakov (one of the most prominent Russian figures in the 19th century), believed the time was ripe to renegotiate the Paris Treaty, particularly the clause on the neutrality of the Black Sea (*ibid.*). Russia declared that it would no longer adhere to this clause. In this context Prussia was supportive (as promised by Bismarck); France had just been defeated and could not quell further resistance while England was hesitant to commit to any unilateral actions against Russia. The latter justified the unfairness of the Paris Treaty on the following grounds: although Russian warships were not allowed to travel around the Black Sea, the other contributing parts of the Paris Treaty (especially Britain) maintained fleets in the Mediterranean and could easily move them to the Black Sea if necessary. This would be threatening for the Russian interests. As a result of the Russian pressure, the London Convention, signed in 1871, allowed Russia to keep a military fleet and build naval bases in the Black Sea (*bid.*).

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In 1875, as Anatolia was gripped by drought and famine, Sultan Abdul Aziz announced that his regime was suspending payment on the huge foreign debt of 191 million pounds it had accumulated, inviting intervention by the European governments to protect their respective bondholders (Hale 2013; 20). Besides this, the brutality that the Ottoman forces embraced to suppress the April uprising in 1876 (known as the Batak massacre in the current Bulgarian territories), alienated the western liberal opinion while Russia threatened to intervene for the sake of her Orthodox Slavic brethren.

In April 1877, the new Sultan, Abdul Hamid, rejected the European reform proposals (designed to protect the non-Muslim minorities on the Ottoman lands) and declared war on Russia that ended up with a Russian victory. The terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, concluded between the Russians and the Ottomans were so advantageous to the former - including the establishment of a large and independent pro-Russia Bulgaria- that the British intervened diplomatically and by moving naval vessels into the Mediterranean. These actions led to the "Great Eastern Crisis" (once again) and the Congress of Berlin in 1878 (Mallinson 2005; 10). Although the aim of the Congress was to establish peace in the Balkans, in the face of the Russian power and the situation of a crumbling Ottoman Empire, Britain realized that the latter could not be considered a 'genuine reliable power' anymore. Consequently, she felt urged not only to counter-balance Russian expansion but also to keep an eye on the developments in Anatolia (Taylor 1971; 60).

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iv) The Cyprus Convention

Based on these developments, in June 1878, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire, after secret negotiations, reached an agreement known as the Cyprus Convention. The Sultan Abdul Hamit II, at the culmination of the Great Eastern Crisis, fearing an eventual Russian expansion into his territories, decided to assign the administration of Cyprus to the British. In this way he wanted to acquire formal guarantees related to the integrity of the Ottoman borders. Thus, the island was “rented” to Great Britain in exchange for offering British security vis-a-vis the perceived Russian threat. According to Article VI of the Annex to the Cyprus Convention, England was supposed to return Cyprus to the Ottoman Empire in case Russians had restored their territorial possessions to the Ottoman Empire after the 1877 Ottoman-Turkish War. To conclude, Britain was exercising a *de facto* and the Ottoman Empire a *de jure* sovereignty on the island.

As it comes out from the above said, the decision to set forth all the diplomatic poker game -played beyond Cyprus- was motivated by the need to better clarify British logic to get involved in the affairs of the island.

Part III The seeds of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalistic sentiments

i) The “Enosis” claims

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Having depicted the existence of various cultures and the transition of the island from one ruler to the other (Part I), along with the reasons that made Great Britain have a say on the affairs in the island (Part II), our attention in this part will be re-drawn to the domestic developments and the ideological zymosis within the communities on the island during the last three centuries.

Although the claims calling for the union of the island with Greece had not become a serious concern for the British rulers until the EOKA campaign of the 1950s, its roots should have been searched much earlier, with the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821¹¹ (Stavros 1950; 59-60). The vast majority of the Greek Cypriots “looked up to their kinsmen in Greece with admiration”(Blay 1981; 68).One of the prominent Greek revolutionary leaders, Konstantinos Kanaris, appeared at the coast of Lapithos near Kyrenia (in the northern part of the island) and the rumors about secret agreements between the Greek Cypriots and the Greek revolutionary movement were intense.The Ottoman administration, under the leadership of the Governor Kucuk Mehmed, sought *a priori* to extinguish a potential “uprising fire” within its territories. Facing the threat of a new revolution -after the several ones that had unfolded in the Balkans in the first quarter of the 19th century- Ottoman forces executed, in July 1821, 486 Cypriots, including Archbishop Kyprianos and four bishops.

¹¹ Reflecting a segment of the above described Great Eastern Question

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In the immediate aftermath of the Cyprus Convention and when Sir Garnet Wolseley landed at Larnaca in 1878, he was welcomed by a Greek Cypriot delegation headed by the Bishop of Kition, who, in the course of an address welcoming his presence to the island, said the following words: "We accept the change of Government inasmuch as we trust that Great Britain will help Cyprus, as it did the Ionian Islands, to be united with Mother Greece, with which it is nationally connected" (Hill G. 1952; 263 cited in Dodd 2010; 3). The Greek Cypriots seemed well prepared to raise such a demand. They had established a "well developed system of political representatives through the [Orthodox] church and a marked degree of national consciousness within the leading groups" (*ibid.*). According to Dodd (2010; 3) during that period, the Greek Cypriot elite, with special reference to the influential church leaders, had absorbed the concept of the *Megali* (Great) *Idea*, meaning the reunification of all Greeks in the Near East under the sovereignty of a single state, whose capital would be Constantinople.

This has been confirmed by words of the British High Commissioner in Cyprus, Captain Charles Orr (1918; 164): "There is a Greek word which figures very largely and is used with peculiar emphasis in many of the leading articles which appear in the Greek newspapers published in Cyprus; it is seldom omitted from the political harangues which the Greek Cypriot loves to deliver on every possible occasion; it is to be heard in the Greek Orthodox Churches, in the sermons preached on the occasion of each national festival; clubs

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endeavor to obtain members, and newspapers, subscribers by adopting the world as their official designation; and it is to be found in practically every one of the many Memorials which have been submitted from time to time by the leaders of the Greek community in Cyprus either to the local or to the Imperial Government. The word in question is 'ENOSIS' meaning 'Union' and it is used to designate the political aspiration for the union of Cyprus with the Kingdom of Greece which is professed by a large portion of the Christian population of the island".

ii) The Ottoman sentiments of the Turkish Cypriots

With respect to the Turkish Cypriot community, its origins seem more recent than the Greek Cypriot ones, since their presence goes back to the Ottoman conquest of the island in 1571. The Ottoman origins of the Turkish Cypriots have been mainly presented by Halil Fikret Alasya (1939) in his book, *Kibris Tarihive Belli Basli Antikiteleri* (Cyprus History and its Main Antiquities). It should be stressed, though, that Ismet Konur, through his book *Kibris Turkleri* (1938; 11), has promoted another paradigm, the Turkish History Thesis, according to which the Hittites who controlled the island in the 14th century BC were Turks,

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thus, tracing ‘Turkish’ rule on the island about three thousand years earlier. However, this opinion has not been echoed by the majority of the Turkish Cypriots so far¹².

Although the Turkish Cypriot national identity is officially assumed in 1943 through the formation of KATAK (*Kıbrıs Adası; Türk Azınlık Kurumu* meaning the Association of the Turkish Minority of the Island of Cyprus), the zymosis for their national identity can be traced decades ago, when the island was under British rule. As manifested in their first newspaper, *Zaman*, Turkish (or better Ottoman) Cypriots, had cultivated the seeds for their religious and ethno-political identity. According to Anagnostopoulou (2004; 175) the “Ottoman Community” of Cyprus witnesses within its milieu the disputes between the various ideological movements that were dominating the Ottoman territory. Focusing on the 1878 period, special attention should be paid to one of them, that had initially proved influential, the “Ottoman legacy”, as this was expressed by the Sultan Abdul Hamid (Deringil 1998).

The term “Ottoman legacy” merits further examination. After the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War the Ottoman Empire had lost vast territories and most of its non-Muslim population in the Balkans (Deringil 1991; 346). Since his empire was gradually disentangled from

¹² For further details see Hatay M. and Papadakis Y. (2012) “1. A Critical Comparison of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Official Historiographies (1940 to present)” in Bryant R. and Papadakis Y. (eds) *Cyprus and the Politics of Memory History, Community and Conflict*, New York: I.B Tauris& Co Ltd.

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Christian elements and subjects¹³, the territorial losses in the Balkans were presented by him as a “window of opportunity” to stress the Islamic religion in the form of a new bid for unity against what he saw as an increasingly hostile Christian world (Duguid 1973; 139). To illustrate and explain Abdul Hamid’s aspiration, Ortayli (1983) parallelized the “caesaro-papist” title emphasized by the Sultan while aiming to enhance the prestige of the shaky state in the international arena (cited in Deringil 1991; 346).

According to Abdul Hamid II, the Ottoman state was somehow *sui generis* and could not be compared to any other polity. Faith in Islam and the organizational genius of Turk were, in his view, self-compelling and self-evident elements, this state composing the Sublime State (Deringil 1998; 5). The practical basis for the sultan’s legitimating ideology was his position as a defender of the holy places, the Haram al-Haramayn in Mecca and Medina. Inspired by

¹³An interesting element to retain, because it reflects historical perceptions of the past with their own significance for the present, is the distinction line drawn by Turks and Turkish Cypriots when referring to the Greeks of the Greek State and the Greeks in Cyprus as well as in the entire Near East. The Greek Cypriots, in a similar fashion with the others Greeks in the Near East, are referred as (*Kıbrıs Rumlar(i)*) meaning Romans, while the citizens of the Greek state are named *Yunan*. This derives from the distinction made by Turkish policy because the term “Rum” is used to determinate the heirs of the ancient citizens of the (Eastern) Roman Empire preceding the Ottoman Empire.

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Resid Pasa¹⁴, he summarized four pillars (dortrukn-u devlet) upon which the Sublime State should be based:

- a) Islam
- b) the maintenance
- c) the protection of the Haram al Haramayn
- d) the maintenance of Constantinople¹⁵ as the capital city of the Ottoman Empire.

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¹⁴Koca Mustafa ReşidPasha was an Ottoman statesman and diplomat, becoming famous as the chief architect behind the Ottoman government reforms that were known as Tanzimat

¹⁵Officially renamed to Istanbul in 1923 under the newly formed Turkish Republic

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