

# Cyprus Album: Strife and Romance

By JACK GOLDFARB

THE PINK-AND-YELLOW Vauxhall taxi rolled through the Mesaoria plain along the highway ribboning east toward Famagusta. Having abandoned, along with the rest of the cafe-sitters, the doldrums of Nicosia's Metaxas Square in its languid siesta hour, I fled from the broiling August heat across forty miles of green terrain to seek solace in the cooling zephyrs of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Two of the other three travelers and the driver of our between-towns collective cab drowsily exchanged comments in Greek. The other passenger was already dozing.

My thoughts were back in the Nicosia archeological museum with the bones of the little Neolithic man who had stalked through these Cyprian fields 5000 years ago. His marvelously well-preserved skeleton indicated that the gentleman had lived to a ripe 150 years before his contemporaries deposited him, huddled as he had been in his mother's womb, into the ground outside the door of his beehive hut. As custom decreed, his premises were sealed up, his artifacts and earthly possessions inside. The enduring chap, with his still perfect set of teeth, had lived in an era when excesses of alcohol, tobacco, and venery were unknown—according to the museum guide. Thus in good shape, at the average age of fifty they plunged into matrimony—these hardy sesquicentenarian Cypriots of fifty centuries ago.

Their latter-day descendants in the taxi with me were all napping now, benumbed by the scorching sun. Occasional villages whisked by, their shops emblazoned with familiar-looking emblems proclaiming in Greek letters: "Pepsi-Cola," "Alka-Seltzer," and "Kodak." Far more advertising was of a political nature. Wherever a wall had offered a public view, the slogan daubers

had been busy: "Enosis!" "Makarios!" and "Rule Britannia!" But the signs were fading. The independent Republic of Cyprus has passed its second birthday and political tranquillity has taken hold.

Signs of the British presence have faded also. The highway skirted past disassembled bases and installations taken over by the Cypriot Army.

One of my fellow-passengers awoke. I asked him a question about politics and everybody awoke. The viewpoint of this all-Greek group was strictly pro-enosis—union with Greece. Once that was made clear, they began a lively recounting of personal experiences during the years of struggle against British rule. All had been arrested at least once on suspicion of terrorist activity. Though their resentment of the British had mostly mellowed, their ethnic conflict with the Cypriot Turks was conspicuously alive.

Not that this quarrel is of yesteryear. Archeological findings in the Nicosia Museum confirm that a lot of folks who had crossed over from Greek Thessaly and Turkish Anatolia were already sharing this tortoise-shaped island back in the days when Old Man Neolithic was chiseling artifacts.

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Famagusta, the chief port and ancient capital of Cyprus, nestled on the shores of the bay bearing its name, fulfilled the promise of refreshing breezes drifting in across the sparkling blue water. Founded in the third century B.C. and getting its name from the Greek *ammochostos*—"buried in sand," the old town is bordered by golden sandy beaches and the sturdy medieval walls built by the Venetians. In the thirteenth century, when Acre, the last Crusader stronghold in the Holy Land, was overwhelmed, thousands of Christian refugees fled to