

Freemasonry in Cyprus—a dysfunctional family

by Tony Pope

The beautiful island of Cyprus, situated in the Eastern Mediterranean off the coast of Turkey and Syria, has a long and chequered history. It is home to Greeks, Turks and British, and since 1974 it has been partitioned into the southern Greek-Cypriot *Republic of Cyprus* and the northern Turkish-Cypriot (de facto) *Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus*, with a buffer zone between them maintained by United Nations troops. Britain has two military bases in the south and east of Cyprus (see map), and a growing colony of civilian retirees.

Cyprus is blessed with 24 Masonic lodges under five ‘regular’ grand lodges, but cursed by the so-called doctrine of exclusive territorial jurisdiction. Freemasonry was brought to the island by the United Grand Lodge of England with St Paul’s Lodge 2277 in 1888. It was joined in 1893 by Zenon Lodge 18 on the rolls of the Grand Orient of Greece, *which has since been renamed the Grand Lodge of Greece*.

The United Grand Lodge of England was in amity with the Grand Lodge of Greece in 1987, when a group of Greek Masons broke away from the Grand Lodge of Greece and formed a *National Grand Lodge of Greece*. This did not disturb the harmony between the two older grand lodges, but in 1993 England accused the Grand Lodge of Greece of irregularities of conduct in lodge and Grand Lodge, and withdrew recognition. England then declared the *National Grand Lodge of Greece* to be regular, and recognised it, some six years after its formation. Scotland, Ireland, the French National Grand Lodge and a few others also withdrew recognition from the Grand Lodge of Greece, but American and antipodean grand lodges did not follow suit. [Readers may recall a similar pattern in relation to disputes between the United Grand Lodge of England and both the Grand Orient of Italy and the Grand Lodge of India.]

In 1999 England declared that the Grand Lodge of Greece had resumed regular practice and urged the Grand Lodge and the National Grand Lodge to reconcile their differences. When this did not occur, England withdrew recognition of the National Grand Lodge, explaining that this would encourage the two Grand Lodges to reach an accommodation. The ‘encouragement’ failed, and the following year England re-recognised the Grand Lodge of Greece, but not the National Grand Lodge.

Both the Grand Lodge and the National Grand Lodge of Greece had chartered lodges in Cyprus, and English Masons were permitted to visit first the lodges of one, then the other, then neither, and then back to square one in favour of the lodges of the Grand Lodge of Greece.

In 2006, six of the Cyprus-based lodges of the Grand Lodge of Greece formed the Grand Lodge of Cyprus, with the blessing of the parent Grand Lodge. The other two Cyprus-based lodges of the Grand Lodge of Greece sought and obtained warrants from the United Grand Lodge of England, which now has 12 lodges in a District Grand Lodge of Cyprus (EC). And so the Grand Lodge of Greece had none! The National Grand Lodge has four lodges which, of course, nobody else could visit after 2000, and England did not extend recognition to the Grand Lodge of Cyprus (although still recognising its parent Grand Lodge of Greece), so there could be no official visitation between the various jurisdictions.

Recently the Grand Lodge of Greece chartered a new lodge in Cyprus, which apparently did not concern England but which upset the Grand Lodge of Cyprus. According to an American report, the Grand Lodge of Cyprus threatened to withdraw recognition of its parent, the Grand Lodge of Greece, if the latter chartered any more lodges in Cyprus. Such action would be a courageous move by the young Grand Lodge of Cyprus, which has not obtained much in the way of mainstream recognition as yet, and certainly not the imprimatur of the United Grand Lodge of England. Another report has the parent grand lodge declaring that it does not intend to charter any further lodges in Cyprus.

Where do all these lodges meet? Well, not surprisingly, the six lodges of the Grand Lodge of Cyprus, the four lodges of the National Grand Lodge of Greece and the lodge under the Grand Lodge of Greece all meet in the southern part of the island, the Greek-Cypriot *Republic of Cyprus*. Nine of the English lodges also meet in Greek-Cypriot territory, two meet on the British military bases, and one (King Tefkros Lodge 9786 EC, formed in 2004) does not advertise its meeting place. Predictably, none of these lodges claims to meet in Northern Cyprus—Turkish-Cypriot territory.

The United Grand Lodge of England, in common with most ‘mainstream’ grand lodges, recognises the Grand Lodge of Turkey, but was more than a trifle upset when Turkey moved a chartered lodge from the mainland into Northern Cyprus. Lefkosa Lodge 1001 moved from Istanbul to Cyprus in February 2009,

meeting in Kyrenia, on the northern coast, but Lefkosa is the Turkish name for Nicosia, a city divided between Turkish and Greek populations by the United Nations 'green line'. Evidently the lodge was formed for the purpose of bringing Masonic light to Northern Cyprus, and (according to the Board of General Purposes of the United Grand Lodge of England) the Grand Lodge of Turkey has no intention of withdrawing the lodge, despite English protests.

The UGLE Board 'recommended' that English Masons do not attend meetings in Cyprus of Lefkosa Lodge 'or any other lodge under the Grand Lodge of Turkey' until further notice. The Board stated that it would continue to make representations to the Grand Lodge of Turkey, and added ominously that it hoped it would 'not need to consider further sanctions in order to safeguard its territory'.

Of course, this begs the question: Whose Masonic territory, if anyone's, is Northern Cyprus?

But beyond that is a question of wider import: Can 21st-century Freemasonry afford to continue under 19th-century notions of ownership of territory? Whatever happened to Brotherly Love?

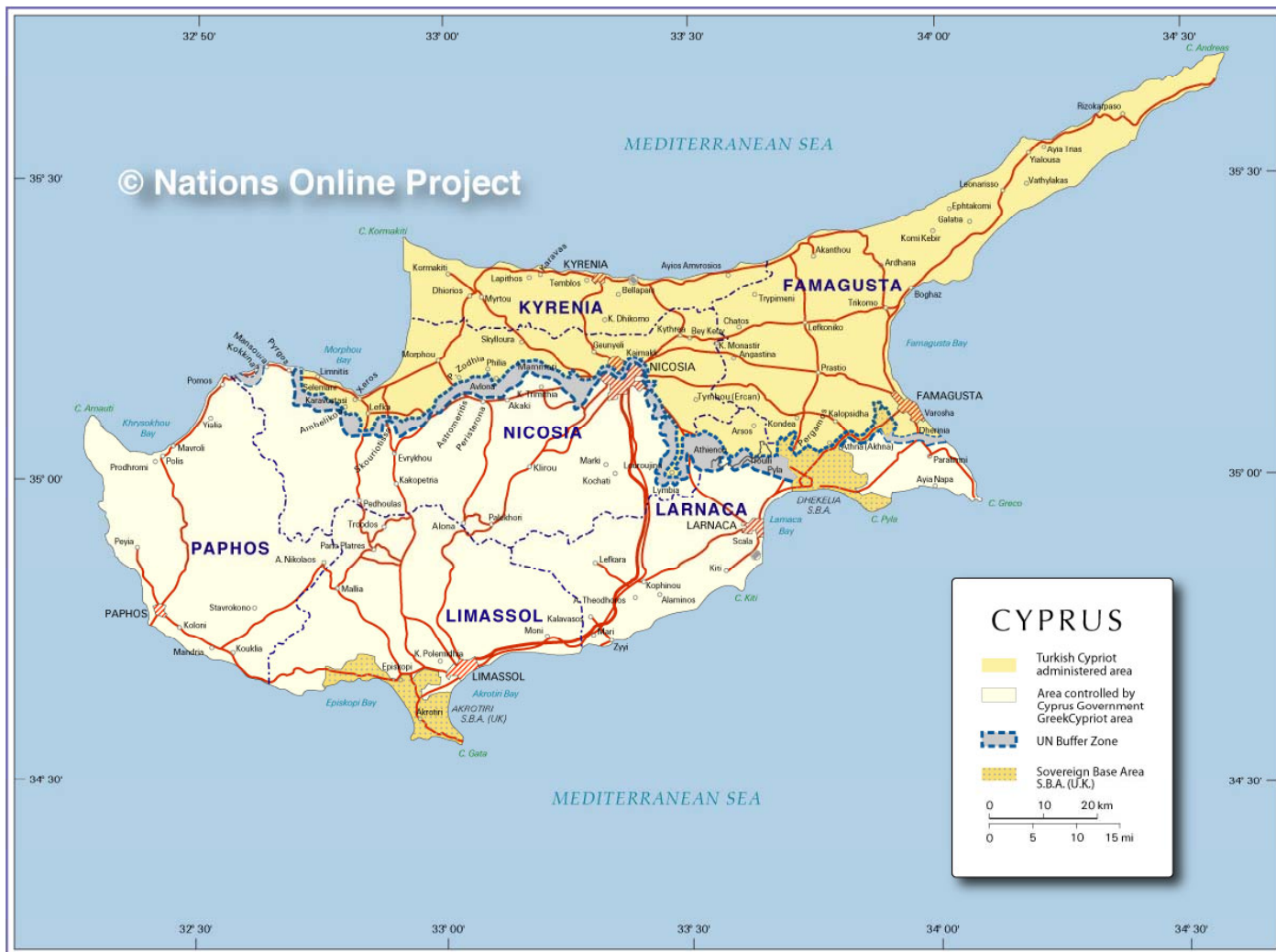


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