

CYPRUS SCENES

The Selimiye Mosque, Nicosia



Picture: Tony Benson

From about 1300 onwards a new power developed in the Middle East, growing from small beginnings into a great empire. The people of this new power were Turks, migrants from the steppes of Asia who settled in Asia Minor, and their empire takes its name from its traditional founder, Osman or Othman, hence the Ottoman Empire. Its attacks on the Eastern Roman Empire completed the fulfilment of the sixth trumpet judgement of Revelation 9, culminating in the taking of Constantinople in 1453, by then an island in a sea of Ottoman territory. The Ottomans continued to expand, taking over southeast Europe and much of the Middle East and North Africa. Cyprus at this time became Venetian territory, and to ward off the Turkish threat the Venetians built massive fortifications, all to no avail, for an overwhelmingly strong Turkish force conquered the island in 1571.

The Turks remained in control till they ceded the island to Britain in 1878, but they left their legacy in a population partly Greek Christians and partly Turkish Muslims. After Cyprus became independent in 1960, conflict between the Greek majority and the Turkish minority led to a Turkish invasion in 1974 and a partitioning of the island between Greeks and Turks. Today the capital Nicosia is the only divided capital city in the world, for the border between the two halves of the island runs through the middle of the city. In the southern, Greek, half, an observation tower at the top of a department store enables one to look across the divided city, the dividing wall hidden by buildings. Prominent on the Turkish side is a large mosque with two minarets, the Selimiye Mosque, named after the sultan Selim in whose reign Cyprus was taken.

This imposing building was originally the Cathedral of Ayia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), and was converted into a mosque by the Turks, along with many of the churches of the island.—*Tony Benson*