Over the years I. B. Tauris has proved the foremost publisher on Cyprus’s history, but the value of its two most recent offerings is mixed.

William Mallinson’s book claims to be “a modern history” of Cyprus, but it is a history of Cyprus from 1950 to the present. Although the “Cyprus Problem” becomes “hot” in 1950s, it is impossible to understand why without a thorough coverage of the period before. Mallinson implies that what transpired before 1950 is unimportant to Cypriot history or the Cyprus Problem. The diplomatic focus neglects Cyprus’s political, social and cultural past.

Mallinson blames the existence of the “Cyprus Problem” on the interests of foreign powers, thus ascribing to the populist conspiracy theory of the Cyprus Problem. Mallinson claims that the Cypriots exerted minimal influence over their homeland’s destiny, which is quite wrong, since right-wing Greek Cypriot leaders through EOKA in the 1950s and then various right and left wing paramilitary groups during the 1960s and 1970s and right-wing Turkish Cypriots through TMT from the 1950s, exerted a great deal of control over the actions of their people and the policy of the other government’s involved.

As I will show below, Mallinson fails to adequately deal with the two fundamental issues relating to Cyprus before 1950: the British strategic interest and the rise of nationalism.

Mallinson claims that Cyprus’s strategic importance was established upon the British occupation in 1878. In fact Cyprus’s strategic place within the British imperial structure was questioned, uncertain and anomalous and this was the belief of most politicians – especially of the Liberal Party – as well as the naval and military advisors and was reflected in efforts to cede Cyprus to Greece after 1912. Although that policy failed it does not change the fact that Cyprus was considered strategically useless before 1916. After the British offered Cyprus to Greece in October 1915, imperialists urged military advisers to reconsider Cyprus’s place within the British imperial structure and they advised that Cyprus was too strategically valuable to be ceded to Greece. Nevertheless, Cyprus was never established as a strategic asset until the early 1950s, although during the Suez Catastrophe the British were forced to use Malta, 1,000 miles away, to launch their naval invasion.

Many historians that approach Cyprus’s history from the Greek nationalist paradigm continue to give credence to a speech supposedly given by an Orthodox Cypriot prelate to Sir Garnet Wolseley, Cyprus’s first high commissioner, with a request that Cyprus be given to Greece. These commentators, including Mallinson, use the speech because it forms the basis of their argument that the Greek Cypriots were Hellenised when the British arrived in 1878. But Rolandas Katsiaounis proved nearly a decade ago that such a speech was never made. Some, including Mallinson, even argue that enosis had existed in 1821 at the time of the Greek War of Independence, when this was not the case as Rebecca Bryant showed this in her groundbreaking study Imagining the Modern, which I. B. Tauris publish in 2004, a year before Mallinson’s book. Bryant convincingly argued that the encounter of the Cypriots with modernism after the British arrival resulted in the development of nationalisms on the island.

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1See Christopher Hitchens, Hostage to History: Cyprus From the Ottomans to Kissinger, Verso, London 1997; and Brendan O’Malley & Ian Craig, The Cyprus Conspiracy: America, Espionage and the Turkish Invasion, I. B. Tauris, London 1999.
2Rolandas Katsiaounis, Labour, Society and Politics in Cyprus During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century, Cyprus Research Centre, Nicosia 1996.
Mallinson focuses on the strategic interest and the rise of nationalism in the 1950s, but makes errors and omissions. He attempts to cover the British desire to hold onto Cyprus’s sovereignty in the 1950s, but fails to provide the real reason for this – the positioning of nuclear weapons on the island for use in defence of the Baghdad Pact which comprised Turkey. He does not analyse EOKA or TMT, right-wing extremist terrorist groups that controlled their communities through fear and heroism, especially the members of the former, in pursuit of their desire for enosis. It was that catastrophic desire, coupled with the desire to overturn the agreements of 1960, which led to its failure and not, as Mallinson asserts, the fault of a “botched constitution”.

It is here where Mallinson’s focus with the role of the foreign powers in Cyprus needed to be counterbalanced with an analysis of the local responsibilities. Turkish Cypriot extremists, led by Rauf Denktash and radical elements in the Turkish military, wanted to undermine the Zurich-London Accords to show that the Greeks were incapable of safeguarding their rights. The Greek Cypriot leadership wanted to undermine the same agreements to bring about enosis or their domination of the Turkish Cypriots by showing that the agreements were unworkable. To this end, the former EOKA leaders founded paramilitary groups. The three main ones were headed by Polycarpos Georgadjis and Tassos Papadopoulos, the Interior and Labour ministers respectively; Vassos Lyssarides, Makarios’ socialist physician; and Nikos Sampson, an unsavoury and fanatical nationalist. It is quite amazing that Georgadjis and Sampson are mentioned only twice and Lyssarides not at all. The person who orchestrated the tragedy of 1963-64 was Georgadjis. As Droushiotis has shown, Georgadjis believed that the quickest way to show that the Zurich-London accords were unworkable was to provoke the Turkish Cypriot extremists, which he knew were armed, to challenge the state. The inter-communal violence that gripped Cyprus from thereon has its roots in Georgadjis’ desire to dominate the island. The fact that Mallinson failed to consult the important works on Cyprus from 1960-74, shows his inexperience in the historiography of Cyprus.

Mallinson only presents one side of the events since the Turkish invasion and in particular the last decade. He ascribes to the “justice for Greek Cypriot” discourse and shows a marked inability to understand that the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots cannot both obtain justice. The solution must inevitably be a compromise. Mallinson again takes the conspiracy theory line and blames the international community for the failure of the latest effort to solve the crisis, especially the British. He calls the UN Plan “the United Kingdom Nations Plan”, which implies that the plan was a UK (Lord Hannay) conspiracy. Not only

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was it not, being based on negotiations between President Clerides, Denktash, the UN Envoy to Cyprus, Alvaro de Soto and Lord Hannay, the British special representative (1996-2003), but the assertion conflicts with Hannay’s first-hand account, which I.B. Taurus also published. Mallinson fails to realise that, regardless of their motives, the international community genuinely tried to solve the crisis and were obstructed first by Rauf Denktash and Turkey and then by Clerides’ replacement, none other than Georgadjis’ right-hand man in his paramilitary group, Tassos Papadopoulos. Mallinson claims that when the players met at Burgenstock prior to the 24 April referendum Papadopoulos submitted various amendments to the UN plan which were rejected, while eleven amendments proposed by the new Turkish Cypriot leader, Mehmet Ali Talat, were accepted. Mallinson’s source is *Athens News*. He ignored the two former presidents of the Republic of Cyprus, George Vassiliou and Clerides, who were part of the Greek Cypriot delegation, who revealed that Papadopoulos refused to propose changes when they urged him to and they made six proposed amendments and five of them were accepted. Then Papadopoulos submitted a 200 page document with amendments at the very last moment, which the UN believed was vague and far too late in the game. Predictably, Mallinson supports the “no” Papadopoulos eventually supported and criticises any party, especially PASOK, for supporting the referendum. Nothing is mentioned of the abuses committed against supporters of Cyprus’s reunification, who criticised Papadopoulos’s stance not to negotiate with Talat at Burgenstock. Mallinson analysed favourable newspapers and interviews and not the documentary evidence available, namely the eyewitness accounts, the letters between Papadopoulos and the UN, the reports of the Select Committee of Foreign Affairs in Britain, which was non-partisan and which includes hundreds of documents, and the report of Amnesty International (September 2004) on the abuses of the Papadopoulos regime against “yes” campaigners.

As mentioned earlier, Mallinson’s book conflicts with Lord Hannay’s, which I. B. Tauris published earlier in the year. Chapter 1, covering 1960-1996, is excellent (although not without flaws) given that it is only 10 pages, compared to Mallinson’s effort, because it is balanced, something which is nearly impossible to be when dealing with Cyprus’s history and the “Cyprus Problem”. The same can be said about his next two chapters, which give his impressions of the players and the issues involved. Sometimes, however, he can be too “neutral”, because he too omits documenting the paramilitary activities of both communities from 1960-74. The next eight chapters cover the eight years spent in the job. The entire account is again extraordinarily balanced, informative, very matter of fact and engrossing. Hannay takes into account the positions of both sides and understands them well. He also recognises the British responsibility for the “Cyprus Problem” and feels a degree of guilt for Britain’s past policies. This resolves him to assist in reunifying the island and it is clear that the challenge motivated him. His role and the events as he witnessed them is his story and it is an invaluable primary source, especially because of the reasons I give above.

Hannay details the negotiations, disputes and outcomes that are part and parcel of international peacemaking and constitutional-making between two communities trying to come together. Although it is not totally clear from his narrative, it is nevertheless implicit that the Cypriots have a diametrically opposed vision of how to bring closure to the events of 1974 and prior and how to reunify Cyprus.

The success and failure of the mission, of which Hannay was only one part of, and not the author of the UN Plans as some would have people believe, was determined in large measure because of factors and events that transpired before and after his term of office. The mission failed overall because the Greek Cypriot leadership proved itself to be immature and ill-prepared for the type of solution which had been first agreed to in 1977 by Archbishop Makarios. The Greek Cypriot political establishment, with the notable
exception of the parties of former presidents George Vassiliou and Glafkos Clerides, was under the illusion that a federal bi-zonal solution would allow it to dominate the central government, restore all the refugees to their homes and properties and remove international guarantees and safeguards. Plainly, such a solution was never on the cards. Nevertheless, it was not all doom and gloom. The massive push for a solution so a reunified Cyprus could join the EU proved the answer for Turkish Cypriots to the issue of economic hardship and political isolation they had been enduring.

Hannay not only illustrates the complex nature of the Cyprus problem in its modern form, which is of great value to historians and political scientists alike, but the new type of diplomacy necessitating the involvement of the UN and the EU. It is a credit to both bodies that they worked so cohesively on one of the most intractable international questions, although there is no doubt that the EU could have been involved earlier.

There is a clear disparity between Hannay’s balanced work and Mallinson’s limited study. Hannay’s book is an excellent first-hand account of the complex dynamics of the Cyprus Problem and international diplomacy and is written in a way that is neither patronising nor parochial. While the wait for a comprehensive, balanced and learned history of Cyprus continues.

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