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MILITARY ORDERS AND POWERFUL WOMEN IN THE CHRISTIAN LEVANT

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

In the Christian East, religious military orders have obviously had interactions with women in leadership roles as queens, princesses and noble women. The relationship between military orders and aristocratic women varies in relation to the power these women actually had in Latin states in the East, the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia and the Latin Empire of Constantinople including Frankish Morea. As such, we must clearly distinguish between women who ran a state or governed a fiefdom by themselves and those under the guardianship of others. This difference influences the attitudes that representatives from the orders displayed towards these noble women. In this study, we are interested in these different types of situations, such as the relationship of the military orders with women in positions of power such as the Queens of Jerusalem Melisende and Sibylla, the Queen Joanna of Naples, who was also Princess of Morea, and other important women. We also examine the very delicate diplomatic intervention by the order of the Hospital concerning the Princess of Tyre, Zapel, sister of the Armenian King, Ochin I and wife to the Governor of Cyprus, Amaury of Tyre, in order to free the King of Cyprus, a prisoner in Armenia. For queens and princesses who were not independent, especially when they were young, we could determine in several cases the level of involvement of military orders in their marriage. The cases examined are representative of the wide range of types of relationships that military orders had with ladies of high social standing in the Christian East.

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Religious military orders, inextricably linked to the Frankish presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and key regional figures depending on circumstances, have obviously had interactions with women in leadership roles as they did with men. For this study, we refer to the term “powerful women in the Christian Levant” as queens, princesses and noblewomen from Latin states in the East, from the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia and the Latin Empire of Constantinople (including Frankish Morea). We cannot comprehensively cover the subject in this paper, so will focus more precisely on certain aspects, presenting specific cases. The relationship between military orders and aristocratic women varies in relation to the power these women actually had. As such, we must clearly distinguish between women who ran a state or governed a fiefdom by themselves and those under the guardianship of others (a father, uncle, regent or the barons’ court, etc.). This difference influences the attitudes that representatives from the orders displayed towards these noble women.

1. MILITARY ORDERS AND WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF POWER

Religious military orders always had a role to play in Eastern Mediterranean Christian States, a role which varied subject to the period. They were part of sovereign courts and their advice, when heeded, also contributed to political and military decisions that governed these States. This cohabitation could be harmonious despite differing opinions or conversely, far more tense. It depended on how the rulers viewed their own power and the way the orders considered their rights and privileges.¹

The Queens of Jerusalem, for example, had quite wide-ranging relationships with the military orders. The first Queen of Jerusalem to rule the state in her own name, at the time of the Crusades, was Melisende. She did not want to share power with her husband and son as her father, Baldwin II, had initially intended. She finally became ruler when her husband, Fulk of Anjou (1131–1143) died, and was crowned Queen at Christmas 1143, together with her eldest son, Baldwin III, still a minor. She consciously surrounded herself with experienced and loyal advisors,

¹ Cf. Marie-Anna Chevalier, “The Templars and the Rulers of the Christian East: Complicity or Conflict of Interest?” in *The Templars: The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of a Military Religious Order*, ed. Jochen Burgdorf, Shlomo Lotan, and Enric Mallorquí-Ruscalleda (London: Routledge, 2021), 50–80.

including the Seneschal of the Templar Order, André de Montbard, one of the first Templars and uncle of Bernard of Clairvaux. André featured as a witness in two of the charters that Melisende issued. When Baldwin came of age, Melisende wanted to retain power and also sought to encourage her youngest son, Amaury, Count of Jaffa and Ascalon. Baldwin was then forced to start a civil war against his mother in 1152 to seize the throne.² Once Melisende was deposed, the Seneschal of the Temple paid the price for his good relations with the Queen. Indeed, while André was in line to become the new Master of the Temple, the Templars themselves thought it more opportune (or judicious for their order) to elect Bernard of Trémelay (1152–1153) in the same year, 1152. Despite everything, Baldwin III demonstrated his political pragmatism and willingness to reconcile and bring peace to his kingdom, as the following year he accepted that André de Montbard (1153–1156) as successor to Bernard of Trémelay as Master of the Temple.³

Another Queen of Jerusalem, Sibylla, daughter of King Amaury I and, as such, Melisende's granddaughter, skilful positioned herself with her husband, Guy of Lusignan, and gained the vital support of the Templars to secure the crown.⁴ The previous ruler, Baldwin IV (1174–1185), who suffered from leprosy, had made plans upon his death to hand the power to his regent and right-hand man, Raymond III of Tripoli, on behalf of young Baldwin V, his nephew and son of Sibylla. The child subsequently died in 1186 and Raymond was removed from power by Sibylla and Guy, supported by Master of the Temple, Gérard of Ridefort (1185–1189). To achieve his goal, Ridefort had the gates to the City of Jerusalem closed and with the Patriarch, forced the Master of the Hospital to give him the

² Baldwin III was crowned sole King at Easter that year. He chose a new Constable and marched on Jerusalem where he forced his mother to step down. Melisende left for Nablus where she died on 11 September 1161.

³ *Willelmi Tyrensis archiepiscopi Chronicon*, vol. 2, ed. Robert Burchard Constantijn Huygens, identification of historical sources and determination of dates by Hans E. Mayer and Gerhard Rösch, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), Lib. 17, chap. 13–14; Hans Eberhard Mayer, "Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26 (1972): 152, 170, 176, 178; Marie-Luise Bulst-Thiele, *Sacrae Domus Militiae Templi Hierosolymitani magistri. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Templerordens 1118/19–1314* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974), 53; Malcolm Barber, "The career of Philip of Nablus in the Kingdom of Jerusalem," in *The Experience of Crusading*, vol. 2, *Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, ed. Peter Edbury and Jonathan Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 67–68; Alain Demurger, *Les Templiers. Une chevalerie chrétienne au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Points–Seuil, 2008, 2nd edition), 206, 208–209.

⁴ With this *a posteriori* footnote, I would like to mention the publication of Helen Nicholson's book on *Sybil, Queen of Jerusalem* (London, Routledge, March 2022). I could not consult it for this article because it was written earlier, for the Torun Conference in September 2021.

key to the treasury to take the crown. Once the city was closed off, the Master of the Temple could then have Sibylla and Guy crowned by the Patriarch of Jerusalem. As such, not only did the Master of the Temple maintain close relations with the ruling couple but he also played a key role in their accession to the throne.⁵ The Templars' close ties with these two Queens of Jerusalem helped the dignitaries of the order to have a sometimes decisive influence over politics in the kingdom.

Queen Joanna of Naples, went even further in the trust she bestowed in a military order. The monarch was both Queen of Naples, Countess of Provence and Princess of Morea, and gave the Hospitaller order control over the latter principality in 1377 for a period of five years. This concession had its advantages, given her responsibilities further west and the virtually constant threats to her throne which meant that Joanna could not govern Morea in situ. The Queen also gained a financial allowance for this time-limited concession as the order had to pay her an annuity of 4,000 ducats. In reality, given the growing military might of the Navarrese, the Brothers of the Hospital could only rule the Frankish state for four years, until 1381.⁶ Joanna, for her part, was assassinated the following year.

⁵ *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, ed. Louis de Mas Latrie (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1871), 115–119, 129–135; *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr (1184–1197)*, ed. Margaret Ruth-Morgan (Paris: Geuthner, 1982), 29–34, 45–46; Ernoul, “L’Estoire de Eracles empereur et la conquête de la terre d’Outremer (suite)”, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Historiens occidentaux*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1859), 8–9, 25–29; “*Les Gestes des Chiprois*”, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Documents arméniens*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906), CCXIX–CCLXIV, 658–659; “*Annales de Terre sainte*”, ed. Reinhold Röhricht and Gaston Raynaud, in *Archives de l’Orient latin, Société de l’Orient latin*, vol. 2, *Documents* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1884), 433 (A–B). On this event, see also Jean Richard, *Histoire des croisades* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 215; Joshua Prawer, *Histoire du royaume latin de Jérusalem*, vol. 1, trans. G. Nahon (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2007, 3rd edition), 635; Demurger, *Les Templiers*, 221–226; Chevalier, “The Templars”, 50–80. On the power and marital unions of the first eight queens of Jerusalem, but with no mention of the involvement of military orders, see Bernard Hamilton, “Women in the Crusader States: The Queens of Jerusalem (1100–1190)”, in *Medieval Women. Dedicate and presented to Prof. Rosalind M. T. Hill on the occasion of her seventieth birthday*, ed. Derek Baker, *Studies in Church History. Subsidia 1* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 143–174.

⁶ On this issue, see the works of Raymond-Joseph Loenertz and Anthony Luttrell: Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, “Hospitaliers et Navarrais en Grèce (1376–1383). Regestes et Documents,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 22 (1956): 319–360 (repr. *Byzantina et Franco-Graeca: articles parus de 1935 à 1966*, vol. 1, ed. Raymond-Joseph Loenertz and Peter Schreiner (Rome: Ed. di storia e letteratura, 1970), 329–350, 359–364); Anthony Luttrell, “Interessi fiorentini nell’economia e nella politica dei Cavalieri Ospedalieri di Rodin el Trecento,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa: Lettere, storia e filosofia*, II ser., 28 (1959): 322–324; id., “The Principality of Achaia in 1377,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57 (1964): 340–345 (repr. *The Hospitallers in Cyprus, Rhodes, Greece and the West, 1291–1440* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997, 3rd edition), XXII); id., “Aldobrando Baroncelli in Greece: 1378–1382,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 36 (1970):

The case of the Queen of Naples is not the only one in the region. At the same time, another important lady of the Frankish Greece, Maddalena Buondelmonti, gave the rights to Vonitza in Epirus, to the Hospitallers after the death of her husband, Lenonardo Tocco, Duke of Leucade and Count of Cephalonia. The Brothers rushed to reach this port on the Gulf of Arta in early 1378. However, this new endowment brought them no gain as the Master of the Hospital, Juan Fernández de Heredia, was captured when they tried to defend Vonitza from the Albanian ruler of Arta, Ghin Boua Spata. He was only released upon payment of a ransom.⁷

Support by powerful women for the Hospitallers in Greece is not limited to these events. Indeed, Isabelle of Lusignan, widow of the despot of Morea, Manuel Cantacuzène, granted the Hospitallers a huge advance payment of 9,500 ducats, probably to pay the Grand Master's ransom.⁸

These various events show that when queens and noble women exercised true power in their state or domain, they often placed their trust in military orders and in various ways.

2. A DELICATE DIPLOMATIC INTERVENTION BY THE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL CONCERNING THE LADY OF TYRE

Aside from queens, *despines* and other noblewomen mentioned so far who had close ties with military orders and granted them political and/or financial support, other powerful women engaged with representatives from the orders in a different way, thus influencing a new type of relationship between both parties. Indeed, the Brothers of the orders had to use diplomacy with certain powerful women, which was not much appreciated by the latter.

279–284, 288 (repr. *Latin Greece, the Hospitallers and the Crusades, 1291–1440* (Londres: Variorum Reprints, 1982), ch. XII).

⁷ Loenertz, “Hospitaliers,” 340–341; Luttrell, “Interessi,” 322–325; id., “Vonitza in Epirus and its Lords: 1306–1377,” *Rivista di Studi bizantini e neoellenici*, n. s. 1, XI (1964) (repr. Anthony Luttrell, *Latin Greece, the Hospitallers and the Crusades, 1291–1440* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1982), ch. VII); id., “Aldobrando Baroncelli,” 279–281, 286; id., “Gregory XI and the Turks: 1370–1378,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 46, no. 2 (1980): 412–413 (repr. *Latin Greece*, ch. XV).

⁸ Dionýsios A. Zakythinós, “Une princesse française à la cour de Mistra au XIV^e siècle. Isabelle de Lusignan Cantacuzène,” *Revue des Études Grecques* 49, fasc. 229 (1936): 73–75 (Source edition: Archives of Malta, *Libri Bullarum*, cod. 321, f. 235, years 1381–1382).

One especially challenging incident for Cypriot-Armenian relations in the early fourteenth century became one of the most emblematic cases of these tensions. It arose after action taken by Hospitallers with Zapel, sister of the Armenian King, Ochin I and widow to the Governor of Cyprus, Amaury of Tyre.

It should be noted that Amaury seized power in Cyprus at the expense of his elder brother, King Henry II, thanks to some skilful political manoeuvring. As he feared an insurrection from the King's supporters, Amaury wanted to drive them out of Cyprus, together with Henry II himself, and asked for them to be imprisoned in Armenia. Ochin, King of Armenia was Amaury's brother-in-law, and indebted to him for his military support. It was Zapel, herself, who was sent to Armenia by her husband to negotiate with her brother the terms of the King of Cyprus' incarceration. After this diplomatic mission, Henry II was forcibly removed on 4 February 1310 and imprisoned in the castle of Lambrun.

Despite the Hospitaller's ambiguous attitude when Amaury staged his military coup, the Brothers of the order lent their support to the Pope's representative and King of France, Raymond of Piis, to have the King freed. The murder of Amaury on 5 June 1310 by one of his companions also helped advance the negotiations. However, Henry II and Amaury's youngest brother, Aimery, subsequently claimed the governorship, backed by Zapel and Amaury's supporters.

Despite the best efforts of the Hospitallers to negotiate, the conspirators gave Ochin false information from an individual named, Nouveau d'Argent, Admiral of Famagusta, who was loyal to Amaury of Tyre. They drafted a false statement by Amaury and made the King of Armenia believe the Hospitallers had helped Amaury's assassins but also that Zapel and her children had been killed. The Grand Preceptor of the Hospital, Guy of Séverac, who was fooled by Nouveau d'Argent into taking him to Armenia, was forced to flee to his ship and write to the King to set the record straight. The King of Armenia was suspicious and subsequently asked a dignitary of the Hospitallers to ensure that his sister and her six children were still alive and that the family be repatriated to Armenia in exchange for the release of Henry II.⁹

After rallying support for King Henry in the Cypriot towns, the Lady of Tyre then became the only obstacle to his release. She categorically refused to travel to Armenia, instead opting to take up residence in the archbishop's palace with her children to benefit from the protection of the Papal legate, the Bishop of Rodez,

⁹ On this issue, see Marie-Anna Chevalier, *Les ordres religieux-militaires en Arménie cilicienne. Templiers, hospitaliers, teutoniques et Arméniens à l'époque des croisades* (Paris: Éditions Geuthner, 2009), 609–617.

Pierre de Pleine-Chassaigne. Despite numerous diplomatic missions sent by the Captain of the King of Cyprus, Ague de Bessan, to meet her and requests from the Queen Mother for Zapel to write to Ochin for Henry II's return, she continued to do nothing. This reluctant attitude spurred the King of Armenia to deny the release of his Cypriot counterpart following a new diplomatic mission on 20 June.¹⁰

It was in this extremely tense atmosphere that the Famagustans asked the Hospitallers to make a diplomatic intervention. According to Amadi, the main source on this case, the Hospitaller Preceptor, Guy of Séverac, requested, with others, the help of the Constable, Balian of Ibelin, to ensure that the Hetumian Princess would be "content to travel to Armenia". The brothers of the Hospital then met with the Lady of Tyre to ask her to go "amicably and voluntarily" to Famagusta to take the necessary steps so that her brother released the King of Cyprus. She was also to "show the same level of commitment that she had when she had him imprisoned and sent there". The Hospitallers also threatened to take away her by force "unless she had an excuse".¹¹ Zapel continued to delay her response but finally relented, setting down her conditions. These were that she be escorted by knights chosen by her and upon arrival in Armenia, she should be taken to the Archbishop of Nicosia's house even if the King was not freed.¹²

With rebellion on the minds of some the Governor's former supporters, Zapel and the other princesses were left alone in Nicosia. They called for the Captain, Ague de Bessan, to protect them which he did on 22 July, with forty Knights Hospitallers and fifty Cypriot knights commanded by the Hospitaller Preceptor of Cyprus, Albert of Schwarzburg.¹³

It was also during the period that another diplomatic mission came to Armenia and following tough negotiations, an agreement was reached on 4 August 1310

¹⁰ *Chroniques d'Amadi et de Strambaldi*, vol. 1, *Chronique d'Amadi*, ed. René de Mas Latrie (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1891), 344–347, 351–357, 358–359; *Chronique de l'île de Chypre par Florio Bustron*, ed. René de Mas Latrie (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1896), 207–210, 212–213, 215–217, 218; Peter Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191–1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 127–128; Nicholas Coureas, *The Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195–1312* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 106–107.

¹¹ *Che dovesse amichevolmente et con le bone deliberar de andar a Famagosta, et far tanto con il re suo fratello che li rendesse el signor loro il re de Cypro, et che fusse di ciò studiosa, come fu in farlo incarcerar et mandar de li, et questo per cortesia et bene; et quando non volesse, che li havesse per eschusi, perchè vegniriano a Nicosia et la menariano per forza*, see *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 358.

¹² *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 357–359; *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 217–219, 223; Georges Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, vol. 2, *The Frankish Period, 1192–1432* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948–1949), 254–256.

¹³ *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 366–367; *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 223–224.

in the presence of both kings. A nine-point treaty was signed setting out the rights and privileges of the Lady of Tyre and her children.¹⁴ It allowed for them to be taken to a small port near Ayas, where the legate of Clement V and Raymond of Piis would await them and conduct the exchange with the King. The news to send Zapel, her children and her personal possessions to Armenia arrived in Famagusta on 10 August.¹⁵ The Lady of Tyre began her journey at the request of her mother-in-law but decided to stop on the way. Ague de Bessan and the Queen Mother were once again forced to ask the Hospitaller Grand Preceptor to accompany the Princess but each day, she put off her departure. Exasperated by her behaviour, the Grand Hospitaller Preceptor had a frank exchange with her on 19 August, recorded by Amadi:

Il commandator del Hospital, li disse: «Dama, sapi che la regina et il capitano m'hanno fatto intendere che debba imbarcar la vostre brigata, perchè le gallie sonno in ordine.» Et la dama de Sur rispose che non si sentiva troppo bene, et che non poteva partirse, et il commandator li respose che li pareva che lei somigliava alli villani, perchè li villani per preghi che se li faccia non vonno mai far niente, fin che il baston li tochi suso; «et così vedo ancor di voi, madama, che io non fazzò altro che andar et tornar a voi, per la regina et per el capitano, matina et sera, per farvi imbarcar; et voi mi menaste con parole fin mo; et hora mi dicete esser amalata et calda et non vi poter partir. Io vi fazzo saver, da parte de la regina et del capitano, che dove vi è sta fatto tutti li apiaceri et commodità che havete saputo dimandar, che se non ve imbarcate, ve faranno imbarcar, volete o no.» La dama a ciò li rispose che non lo preciava un pistachio, et l'ha dispreciato.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cf. *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 365–366, 371–374; *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 227–230.

¹⁵ *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 374–375; *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 230–231; Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, 2: 258.

¹⁶ *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 376. See also *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 232. Nicholas Coureas and Peter Edbury translated this extract from Italian in *The Chronicle of Amadi* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 2015), § 711, 343–344): “The commander of the Hospital said to her: ‘My lady, you should know that the queen and the captain have given me to understand that you must embark your household, for the galleys are ready.’ The lady of Tyre replied that she did not feel too well and could not depart, and the commander replied that it seemed to him that she was behaving like the serfs, for the serfs will never do anything in response to the requests made to them until the rod comes down upon them; ‘and this is how I still regard you, madam, for I do nothing else other than come and go for you, for the sake of the queen and the captain, morning and evening, to get you to embark, while you put me off by way of fine words; and now you tell me that you are unwell and feverish and unable to depart. Let me tell you on behalf of the queen and the captain that until now all the favours and facilities that you have been known to request

Guy of Séverac informed Ague de Bessan about Zapel's behaviour and this time, the Captain appointed Robert of Mongesart to meet the Armenian Princess and try to change her mind. She agreed to leave and told him that she did not like the Hospitaller Preceptor, "as the enemy of the Hospitallers" and that she would have left earlier if someone else had been sent.¹⁷ Despite a further attempt by the Armenians to not release the King, the exchange was finally made on 20 August in the port of Ayas. Huguet, followed by his mother, Zapel, begged to be pardoned by their ruler and returned to Cyprus several months later with the last hostages.¹⁸

As a result, the Grand Preceptor, Guy of Séverac, who served the Master of the Hospital, Fulk of Villaret, had to allay the suspicions of King Ochin I. The latter feared that his Cypriot hostages would flee to Rhodes and so did not want to release Henry II. Also, Guy of Séverac had to cope with the strong-minded Hethumian Princess Zapel who refused to go to Armenia so that the King of Cyprus, who she had imprisoned, could be released. At the time of these events, the Hospitallers in Armenia had their entire possessions confiscated, surely paying the price of their support to the King of Cyprus. The order only returned to its Armenian domains in 1320.

There are other cases of diplomatic interventions by military orders for noblewomen in the Eastern Mediterranean albeit of less epic proportions.

3. THE ROLE OF MILITARY ORDERS IN THE MARRIAGES OF QUEENS AND PRINCESSES

While they were occasionally powerful, most aristocratic women had no choice about whom they married. This was especially so for their first marriage and also

have been granted and that if you do not embark they shall make you embark willingly or not.' To this the lady replied he was not worth a pistachio, and she heaped abuse on him."

¹⁷ *Et li ha ditto non si sentire, è stato perchè lo vol male, essendo inimica de li Hospitalieri; et se li havesseno mandato altro messo saria stata imbarcata dal primo giorno*, see *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 377. See also *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 232.

¹⁸ Jean Dardel, "Chronique d'Arménie," in *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Documents arméniens*, vol. II (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906), 23–24; *Chroniques d'Amadi*, 377–379, 390; *Chronique de l'île de Chypre*, 232–235, 242–243; Leontios Machairas, *Chronique de Chypre*, ed. and trans. Emmanuel Miller and Constantinos Sathas (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1882), 39; id., 'Une Histoire du doux pays de Chypre', *Leontios Machairas' manuscript of Venise*, trans. Isabelle Cervellin-Chevalier (Besançon: Praxandre, 2002), 54; Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, 2: 259–260, 266; Coureas, *Latin Church*, 108–109, 169; Chevalier, *Les ordres*, 617–622.

when the lady was young, sometimes very young. It also applied to slightly older women, albeit more rarely, when political or military circumstances dictated. We will now present several examples of marriages in which military orders were involved, each in different ways.

3.1. *An active and tangible contribution to organising royal marriages*

Two charters dated 23 April 1214 provide us with an insight into the role the Hospitallers had in the marriage of Lewon I's (the first King of Cilician Armenia) eldest daughter, Rita – also called Stephanie – to the King of Jerusalem, John of Brienne. These documents actually attest to the influence of financial aid provided by the Hospitallers to the King of Armenia for this event. Firstly, the Master, Garin of Montaigu 'friendly' conferred the sum of 10,000 Saracen besants to the King of Armenia on behalf of the order. This was not strictly speaking a 'donation' as the order received the Domain of Vaner in return, in addition to others. Furthermore, the Master also agreed to loan the monarch 20,000 Saracen besants in return for use of the district of Dcheker for a minimum of two years. This was clearly a contribution by the Hospitallers to Rita's dowry.¹⁹ Among the challenges underpinning this marriage was first and foremost reconciliation between the Kings of Armenia and Jerusalem that had suffered from wrangling over the inheritance of Antioch and John of Brienne's overt support for the Templars in this complex affair.²⁰ The Hospitallers arranged this alliance between the two rulers and financial matters aside, the order members served as intermediaries and escorts for the Princess. Pseudo-Sembar's chronicle on the matter is clear on this point:

¹⁹ Sebastien Paoli, *Codice diplomatico del sacro militare ordine Gerosolimitano, oggi di Malta, raccolto da vari documenti di quell'archivio, per servire alla storia dello stesso Ordine. In soria e illustrato con una serie cronologica de Gran Maestri, che lo governaro in quei tempi, con alcune Notizie Storiche, Genealogiche, Geografiche, ed altre Osservazioni*, vol. 1 (Lucques: Salvatore e Giandomenico Marescandoli, 1733–1737), 104 no. 99, 105–106 no. 100; *Cartulaire général de l'Ordre des Hospitaliers de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem (1100–1310)*, vol. 2, ed. Joseph Delaville le Roulx (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897), 164–165 no. 1426, 165–166 no. 1427. For further details, cf. Chevalier, *Les ordres*, 403–405.

²⁰ Chevalier, *Les ordres*, 146–148.

As the Master of the Hospitallers travelled from Acre by boat, to the River Tarse estuary, the King set out with him the conditions for the marriage. Next, he brought Rita and they took her to Acre where she was married.²¹

The Master of the Hospitallers also intervened 38 years later to arrange the marriage of King Het'um I's daughter, Fimi, with Julien, Lord of Sidon and Beaufort. In the marriage agreement, the King of Armenia stated that the Master of the order, William of Châteauneuf, together with John of Ibelin, Count of Jaffa, had to define the substantive conditions for the marriage, particularly the sums of the Princess' dowry and dower:

Nos tenrunt les convenances qui sont faites par la main do tres religios maistre de la sainte maison de l'Ospital de saint Johan de Jerusalem, frere Guilliam de Chastel Nov, e par la main do gentil cunte de Jafe sire Johan d'Ibilin.²²

Among the clauses defined, Het'um agreed to pay a dowry amounting to 25,000 Saracen besants while Fimi was to receive a dower worth 8,000 Saracen besants in land and income.²³ This time, no reference is made to a financial contribution from the Hospitaller order to the payment of the dowry. By contrast, in August 1254, with Fimi's agreement, Julien of Sidon sold a domain called Robert to the Hospitallers for 24,000 Saracen besants, although no direct link can be found between this and the dowry.²⁴

As such, the Hospitallers helped restore closer Armenian-Frankish ties, and to the integration of the Armenian state of Cilicia into the Latin states of the Levant, a process that had already begun several decades earlier.

From 1311 to 1315, the Hospitallers also arranged the marriage of Marie, daughter of the former ruler of Cyprus, Hugh III (1267–1284), with James II, King of Aragon (1262–1327). They took part in diplomatic mission exchanges that resulted in an engagement agreement in 1314 and marriage the following year. James II subsequently expected to inherit the throne of Cyprus through his wife,

²¹ *La chronique attribuée au Connétable Smbat*, ed. and trans. Gérard Dédéyan, Documents relatifs à l'Histoire des Croisades 13 (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1980), 89.

²² Paoli, *Codice*, 1, 134–135 no. 119; *Le Trésor des Chartes d'Arménie ou Cartulaire de la chancellerie royale des Roupéniens*, ed. Victor Langlois (Venise: Typographie arménienne de Saint-Lazare, 1863), 146–147 no. 20; *Cartulaire général*, 2, ed. Delaville le Roulx, 718 no. 2581.

²³ Paoli, *Codice*, 1, 134–135 no. 119, 484; Langlois, *Trésor*, 146–147 no. 20; *Cartulaire général*, 2, ed. Delaville le Roulx, 718 no. 2581. On this marriage, see also Chevalier, *Les ordres*, 405–407.

²⁴ *Cartulaire général*, 2, ed. Delaville le Roulx, 761–763 no. 2688, 764–766 no. 2693.

the eldest of Henry II's sisters. This was because Henry had no direct descendants and his youngest brother had been imprisoned after plotting against him.²⁵

3.2. *The decision-making role of military orders in the choice of royal marriages in Jerusalem*

Military orders intervened directly in Jerusalem's domestic affairs during one of the many critical periods experienced by the kingdom. They began by giving their opinion on the choice of new rulers, deciding on the marital unions with heiresses to the Kingdom.

After Guy of Lusignan left for Cyprus and Conrad of Montferrat was assassinated in 1292, Isabelle, his widow and second daughter of King Amaury I, became heiress to the crown. This new status saw her marry four successive husbands that she did not choose.

Her mother forced her to marry Conrad while she was married to Onfroi IV of Toron.²⁶ When Conrad died, it was the council of barons, comprising the Patriarch, Archbishop, Prelates, Barons, Templars and Hospitallers, who decided on a new husband for Isabelle, not the Queen herself. The same happened after the death of her third husband, Henry of Champagne. During the council to decide his successor, Hugues of Tibériade proposed that the Queen marry his brother, Raoul. The Masters of the Templars and Hospitallers disapproved, deeming Raoul to have insufficient means to assist the kingdom. Finally, Aimery of Lusignan, King of Cyprus, was chosen and subsequently ruled both kingdoms.²⁷

After Aimery's death in 1205, Isabelle and Conrad's daughter, Marie of Montferrat, became heiress to the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Once again, the council, which included representatives of the Templars and Hospitallers, chose a husband for her in the form of John of Brienne, in 1210.²⁸

²⁵ Edbury, *The Kingdom*, 136–137.

²⁶ Hamilton, "Women", 172–173.

²⁷ *La Continuation*, ed. Ruth-Morgan, 198, 199; Ernoul, "L'Estoire de Eracles", 2, 222–223; Demurger, *Les Templiers*, 351–352; Chevalier, "The Templars", 59–60.

²⁸ *Il avint cose que li patriarche, li archevesque et li evesque et li baron de le tiere s'asamlerent, et li Temples et li Hospitaus; si parlèrent ensamble, et prisent conseil à cui il poroient doner la demoisiele, et faire roi de le tiere*, see Ernoul, *Chronique*, 407–408; see also *ibid.*, 409; and *ibid. Estoire de Eracles*, 2, 305–307.

3.3. *The specific case of various implications concerning military orders in the matrimonial affairs of Queen Zapel*

Zapel (1212–1252), Queen of Armenia, had two husbands. The first was hurriedly chosen by the kingdom's barons following the death of Zapel's father, Lewon I, in 1219. His name was Philippe, third son of the Prince Bohemond IV of Antioch and they married in the early 1220s. However, the official Regent of the Kingdom of Armenia, Kostandin, accused the young king of appropriating part of the royal treasury for the Principality of Antioch. Kostandin had Philippe imprisoned and then poisoned. Kostandin's real motive was to have Zapel marry one of his sons so that his own family, the Hetumians, would rule Armenia.

The military orders were involved to varying degrees, in their own way, at the end of the young queen's first marriage and the start of her second. The Templars were accused of having encouraged Philippe to remove Armenian lords from his entourage and replace them with Franks. An altogether more serious accusation was made against them half a century later by Hét'um of Korykos. It was claimed they wanted to destroy the Armenian Church²⁹ although their accuser was no friend of the Templars and was involved in events that led to the brothers of the order being arrested in Cyprus at the time of the trial³⁰.

The Teutonic Knights, for their part, appeared to be close to the Regent Kostandin as they had agreed to guard Philippe who was imprisoned in their fortress at Amuta, in 1225³¹.

It was however the brothers of the Hospital who were the centre of attention. The Hospitaller 'Castellan' (*castellanus*) of Seleucia, Bertrand, had to cope with an unexpected situation that saw the order play a key role in Kostandin's new plans to have Zapel marry his own son, Hét'um. The young queen refused the marriage and fearing the bailiff Kostandin fled to take refuge with her mother in the Seleucia Fortress. The Hospitallers were the only ones that the two women trusted.

²⁹ Hét'um l'Historien, "Histoire de l'azg des Rovbinank' (in Armenian)," ed. V.-A. Hakobyan, in *Chroniques Mineures* (in Armenian), vol. 2 (Erevan: Publication de l'Académie des Sciences d'Arménie, 1956), 104; *Lignages d'Outremer*, ed. Marie-Adélaïde Nielen, Documents relatifs à l'Histoire des Croisades publiés l'Académie des inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 18 (Paris: F. Pailart, 2003), 138.

³⁰ A study is devoted to the "Rôle de Hét'oum de Korykos dans l'arrestation des templiers de Chypre" in Chevalier, *Les ordres*, 597–603. On this Armenian historian, see also Claude Mutafian, "Héthoum de Korykos, historien arménien. Un prince cosmopolite à l'aube du XIV^e siècle", *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales* 1 (1996): 168–171.

³¹ Chevalier, *Les ordres*, 173–174.

Kostandin pressured the Brothers and the young woman to give herself up. After having resisted everything that could possibly be done to her in a country where the real ruler's grip tightened around the fortress like a vice, the Hospitallers finally agreed to sell their stronghold to the Regent and indirectly handed over Zapel. Kostandin immediately forced her to marry his son, Het'um (on 14 June 1226)³². The royal couple then forged close ties with the Teutonic Knights during the following decade as Zapel became *consoror* and Het'um, a *confrater*, of their order³³.

As a result, the Brothers of the Temple and Teutonic order were involved in the end of Zapel's first marriage while the dignitaries from the Armenian Preceptory of the Hospital fruitlessly tried to prevent the queen's second marriage, which only momentarily delayed the inevitable.

The relationship between the orders and powerful women in the Christian Levant is therefore multifaceted. It depends not only on titles but also on the actual status of each lady and the position of the order in relation to the woman.

Was the military order in a 'dominant' position as we seen in the periods during which there was no male royal leader in Jerusalem? Was it supportive of a male monarch aiming to marry off a daughter, as in Armenia or Cyprus? Was it duty-bound, as towards the queens and noblewomen in Latin Empire of Constantinople, Morea or Jerusalem? Or did it have a negotiating role as with the Lady of Tyre, between Cyprus and Armenia?

The cases examined in this paper do not present an exhaustive picture of the regions concerned, neither do they consider the States of Antioch, Tripoli and Edessa. They do, however, represent a wide range of the types of relations that military orders could have with women of high social standing in the Christian East.

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³² Ibid., 175–177.

³³ Marie-Anna Chevalier, "Les chevaliers teutoniques en Cilicie: 'les Maccabées' du Royaume arménien," *Bizantinistica. Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi*, 2nd series, 6 (2004): 137–153.

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