

# Lebanon's ten Armenian princesses

(1186 — 1312)

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At the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, as the new « Lesser Armenian » state of Sissouan began to establish itself in the strategic coastal mountain strip of Cilicia, athwart the Crusaders' line of communications with Constantinople, closing out the Moslem interior from the sea and controlling key East-West trade routes, there had already been a number of matrimonial alliances between the Frankish new-comers and Sissouan's Armenian princely houses.

Queens of Jerusalem and a Countess of Edessa of Armenian origin had stamped an Armenian flavour on the most important courts of Outremer before the advent of Armeno-Cilicia's first King, Leo II of the Rupenids<sup>1</sup>. Leo « The Magnificent », who, in 1198-99, had revived the glories of Hayastan's great Bagratuni, Mamikonian, Pahlavouni, Ardzrouni and other ancient dynasties of Greater Armenia by restoring the throne of the last Armenian Shahanshah, Gaghiik II of Ani (who had died c. 1079) through his securing of the royal crown both from Byzantine Emperor Alexis III, Angelos, and Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI of Hohenstaufen, now cast his eyes on the growing power of neighbouring Lebanese feudal barons.

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1. R. Rohricht, *Geschichte des Königreichs Jerusalem*, Innsbruck, 1898, p. 755, (gives date of final, Holy Roman Empire, coronation as : 23-5-1199).

Lebanon, at the time, was divided between the sovereign Princes of Antioch, as Counts of Tripoli, and the Kings of Jerusalem, but the actual ruling families, with their great feudal castles and warlike Maronite levies, included the Puylaurens, Lords of Gebelacar (Akkar), the Lords of Golaiath (Qulaiat), Botron (Batroun), Nephin (Enfe), la Sainte Montagne (Besharre), le Moineestre (Mneitri), Giblet (Jebail-Byblos), Beyrouth (Beirut), la Sagette et Beaufort (Sidon and Shaqif Arnoun), Toron (Tibnin) and Tyr (Sur). Edessa had long been lost to the Moslems. The Byzantine authority had been eroded by Crusader encroachments and the Kings of Jerusalem had failed to establish a stable dynasty, or even to hold their capital city itself. So there remained the considerable power of the great barons of Lebanon and Antioch, coupled with that of the Crusading Orders of the Templers, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights, largely based in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, protecting Sissouan's southern flank and offering a new supply of great mail-clad Frankish knights to bolster Lesser Armenia's precarious defenses against the Moslem East. Since matrimonial alliances could not be made with the knightly Orders, Leo set about forging them with the Lebanese feudal aristocracy, a policy which was continued down to the end of Rupenid-Hethumid-Lusignan rule over Armeno-Cilicia.

History is aware of Leo's first attempt to secure a Crusader steel rod to strengthen the Armenian throne by proclaiming his great-nephew Raymond-Rupen, Prince of Antioch and Count of Tripoli (son of his niece Alix, a daughter of his predecessor, Rupen III) not only Crown Prince of Armenia but also crowning him in Sis, in 1211, with a new crown provided by Emperor Otto IV, of the House of Bavaria, as co-King of Armenia<sup>2</sup>. The attempt failed, as King Raymond-Rupen I proved more Frankish than Armenian and posed a threat to the perpetuation of Armenia's unique culture and most ancient of all Christian national churches. Leo's own subsequent temporizing with Frankish Latin civilization went no farther than his imposition of a thin veneer of court protocol, and he soon junked Raymond-Rupen in favour of the succession of his own daughter, the Princess Isabel (Zabelkhatoum). Alix,

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2. Rohricht, pp. 795-921 (he gives the exact date as 15-8-1211).



one of the first of Lebanon's Armenian princesses, did not accept her uncle's views, and, after his death, in 1219, accompanied her son and his Antioch-Tripoli forces on an invasion of Sissouan, in the course of which they captured Tarsus (in 1220). Raymond-Rupen, an already-crowned King of Armenia, had papal backing and would undoubtedly have sought to impose the Latin rite should he again reach Sis. This alarmed the barons of the « Armenian » as opposed to the « Latin » party, and under the leadership of the Grand Baron Constantine of Barbaron, Regent of Armenia in the name of little Queen Isabel, they rallied around the red lion flag, raised an army of defense, captured Tarsus and imprisoned both Raymond-Rupen and his mother, in 1221<sup>3</sup>. By 1223 the ex-king was dead, his little daughters spirited away to Cyprus with their Lusignan mother, and his mother, no longer Countess of Lebanese Tripoli, destined to survive until 1234 as the Lady of Korikos in Armenia, with her third husband, Vahan<sup>4</sup>, of whom we shall hear subsequently in connection with a later Armenian princess in Lebanon.

In spite of this set-back in Leo's original policy of seeking Lebanese matrimonial alliances, the Grand Baron attempted to extend it, with adequate guarantees, by finding a Syro-Lebanese husband for little Isabel, instead of exporting Armenian princesses to Antioch-Tripoli. The guarantee came in the form of the Prince-Consort-elect's agreement to become a member of Armenia's national church and to be crowned and spend his life in Sis as an Armenian. Since the candidate, Philip of Antioch-Poitiers, was fourth son to Bohemond IV, Prince of Antioch and Count of Tripoli, who had been excommunicated, anyway, from the Roman Church and cared not a fig for papal designs on Armenia, and since he had virtually no prospects of inheriting his father's Syrian and Lebanese possessions, he readily agreed to the Grand Baron's terms, came to Sis, and married Queen Isabel. Crowned as King Philip I under the rites of the national church, the Syro-Lebanese Frankish noble had every chance to found an acceptable dynasty

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3. C. Cahen, *La Syrie Nord à l'époque des Croisades*, Paris, 1940.

4. G. Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus*, Oxford, 1932, p. 443.



which would permanently link Armenia with the greatest houses of Outremer and western Europe. Unfortunately, although Philip was a veritable Prince Charming to the child-bride, he did not long survive their joint crowning in June of 1222<sup>5</sup>, due to his incorrigible Frankish orientation, even more so than had been the case of his predecessor and first-cousin, Raymond-Rupen. He was Armenian only in name, and used to slip away to Antioch on every possible opportunity. On one of these junkets, in 1224, he was waylaid by barons of the « Armenian » party, under orders of the Grand Baron, imprisoned, and finally poisoned. The heart-broken little Isabel was forced to marry the Grand Baron's ten-year-old son, Hethum, and to found, with him, the Hethumid-Rupenid dynasty which was to provide the country's next nine kings and eight Armenian princesses in Lebanon. The marriage was finally consummated in 1226<sup>6</sup> and gave eight princesses and princes to the Royal Family, three of whom were to marry into the Lebanese nobility.

Before this, however, King Leo's own sister, Doleta<sup>7</sup>, the first Armenian princess to spend her life in Lebanon (Alix had preferred Antioch, although, as Countess of Tripoli, she had resided in Sinjil Castle and in the Toulousian counts' palace at al-Mina when her son was able to maintain himself there against the usurpations of his uncle, Bohemond IV) had, in 1186, married the Sire Bertrand Embriaci de Giblet. Bertrand was head of the Tripolitanian branch of that richest and most long-lived of all the families of Outremer, whose head, Hugh III, in 1187, had been one of the principal architects of the reconquest, even though his principal castle town of Jebail-Byblos had been lost for ten years to Saladin's forces.

Tripoli had not fallen (Hugh III had taken refuge there) to Saladin, and the Princess Doleta resided in the town house of the

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5. W. H. Rudt-Collenberg, *The Rupenids Hethumids and Lusignans*, Paris, 1963, p. 55.

6. Rudt-Collenberg, p. 55.

7. Rudt-Collenberg, p. 52 (Rudt cites: Talita; Du Cange; Paoli; Cod. Dipl. I, p. 1517, Rev. de l'orient Latin III, 1895).



Embriaci in al-Mina and on the estates of her husband's cadet branch of the family in the coastal mountains. Doleta was the great-grandmother of the Sire Bartholomew Embriaco de Giblet, Captain-General of the bourgeois Republic of Tripoli and Mayor of the Tripolitanian Commune during that Lebanese city's revolt against the sadistic later Princes of Antioch, in 1287-88. Deposed at the time was Bohemond VII's sister and heiress, the Countess Lucia, herself half-Armenian through her mother, the Princess Sibel<sup>8</sup>, daughter of King Hethum and Queen Isabel. The latter, in 1254, had married Bohemond VI, and after 1268, when her husband's Principality of Antioch had fallen to the Mamluks, had resided continuously in Tripoli as one of Lebanon's most long-lived Armenian princesses. In the end, Sibel had to take refuge at the court of her nephew, King Hethum II, and ended her life in exile from her Syro-Lebanese principality in 1290, after Lucia's brief restoration in Tripoli had been followed by the fall of that city, too, in 1289. Princess Sibel's marriage was the Armenian dynasty's last alliance with the ill-starred Tripolitanian family and gave way to a series of matrimonial links with the more durable House of Ibelin, Lords of Beirut, by far the greatest of all baronial families of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The first of the Armenian princesses to intermarry with the Ibelins was Maria of Korikos, the wife of Philip d'Ibelin, son of Bailan II of Beirut and of the imperial princess Maria Comnena of Byzantium, Queen Mother of Jerusalem, and it is perhaps the most interesting of all Armenian matrimonial alliances with Lebanon. Maria<sup>9</sup> was the daughter of Vahan, Lord of Korikos and of Euphemia of Pertag. Her father, an over-ambitious baron, executed for high treason in 1222, had been Constable and Marshall of Armenia, and was descended from Echivard de Chabannais et Conflan, Senechal of Antioch (1149-75), whose Frankish descendents apparently married into the Armenian nobility and had become completely Armenized. Vahram, hoping to get the throne for himself, had repudiated Euphemia, sending her back to her brother Leo, the

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8. Rudt, p. 67; R. Grousset, *Histoire des Croisades*, Paris, 1948, Vol. III.

9. Rudt, Table XI, Vol. I, No. 29.



Lord of Pertag and Manhrod, and had married, as we have seen above, the Princess Alix, daughter of Rupen III and mother of Raymond-Rupen. This had outraged the Catholicos and brought about a condemnation by Gregory Bar Hebraeus in the « **Chronography** » in which he qualifies it as « compulsory fornication and not lawful betrothal »<sup>10</sup>. Maria's mother came of better stock, for Euphemia Savèn-Pahlavouni of Pertag was a granddaughter of Prince Shahan, an Armenian Sebastos and Strategos of the Byzantine Empire and a brother of the Catholicos, St. Nerses IV Schnorhali, as well as a descendent of the Mamikonian, Pahlavouni and Arsacid dynasties. Maria accompanied her Lebanese husband to Cyprus, in 1218, where he became Bailli and *de facto* Regent of the Kingdom for its 8-month-old baby King, Henry I, so that Maria of Korikos presided, after the flight of Queen-Regent Alice to Tripoli in 1223, as first lady of the land until the death of her husband in 1227. Maria's son, John d'Ibelin, Lord of Jaffa and Bailli of Jerusalem, maintained the Armenian connection by marrying Kalamaria<sup>11</sup>, a daughter of the Grand Baron Constantine and a sister of King Hethum I.

Lebanon's next Armenian connection came with the marriage of Maria<sup>12</sup>, a daughter of King Hethum and Queen Isabel, to a cadet of the Ibelins, Guy, grandson of John « the Old », Lord of Beirut, and a great-nephew of the Bailli Philip and Maria of Korikos. It is interesting to know that from this marriage were descended the « Armenized » Ibelins<sup>13</sup>. Their two children, Maria and Thoros d'Ibelin both made advantageous Armenian marriages. Maria became the consort of Hethum « the Historian », Lord of Korikos, who died in 1318, while Thoros, Lord of Joffriglà in Sissouan married Zabel, daughter of the Hethumid baron Oshin

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10. Bar Hebraeus, p. 443; L. M. Alishan, *Leon le Magnifique*, Venice, 1888, «Petite Chronologie», p. 104.

11. Alishan, *Sissouan*, p. 88.

12. V. Langlois, *Les relations des Gènes avec le Royaume de la Petite Arménie*, Torino, 1861, p. 28.

13. Rudt, Table III a (H3) (citing La Monte, in «BYZANTION» XVII, 1944-45) p. 188.



of Saravantikar, and had two children, Rita and Leo.

Another Ibelin-Armenia connection took place when another grandson of John « the Old » of Beirut, a second Philip d'Ibelin, Regent of Cyprus, took for his bride Zabel of Lampron<sup>14</sup>, a daughter of Baron Oshin IV of Asgouras, and the final alliance with the Ibelins took place in 1279 when Baldwin IV d'Ibelin and Alix of Lampron<sup>15</sup>, daughter of Hethum IV (a brother of Oshin IV) were united in marriage. By now the sands were running out for the Ibelins of Beirut, for, on 31 July, 1291, the Ibelin garrison capitulated to the army of Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil. Crusader Lebanon, except for an extension of eight more years for the Embriaci de Giblet, was dead, and her sons had to go into exile on Cyprus. The son of Alix and Baldwin, Guy, who predeceased his Armenian mother, in 1309 (she was still living in 1312) became Lord of Nicosia and Senechal of Cyprus. Guy's sister, Margaret, however, carried the Lebanese-Armenian alliances one step farther by returning to her mother's homeland and becoming the wife of Oshin of Korikos and the mother of Maria, the Queen of Constantine IV of Armenia, as well as of Alix, first wife of King Leo V, who died in 1341, last of the Hethumid-Rupenids, and grandmother to perhaps the last Armeno-Cilician king, Oshin of Oghruy-Korikos, (Ashot I)<sup>16</sup>. Ashot, a Mamluk and a Moslem, was recognized in 1374-75 by Armenia's Mamluk suzerains in opposition to the Latin (Frankish) Lusignan, Leo VI, but deposed due to Mamluk anger with the whole Armenian Royal Family because of Leo's hair-brained and totally disastrous adventure in Sis.

There were, however, Hethumid princely marriages with the next two (after the Ibelins) ranking baronial families of Lebanese parts of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the houses of Grenier and Montfort-Toron, which placed Armenian ladies as consorts to the Lords of Sidon and Beaufort and the Lords of Tyr, Toron and Belindas (Baniyas). First of these was when the Princess Euphe-

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14. Rudt, Table II (H1).

15. Alishan, *Sissonan*, p. 352.

16. P. Bedoukian, *Coinage of Cilician Armenia*, N.Y. 1962, P. 23. Rudt, p. 75 and Table III (H2).



mia<sup>17</sup>, another daughter of King Hethum I, became the wife of Julien Grenier de la Sagette et Beaufort, Lord of Sidon, in 1252, but Euphemia was the Lady of a dying barony, and her son, Bailan II, was to be the last Lord of Sidon. The fault lay more with Julien than with the barony's Mamluk-Mongol enemies, as he was a notorious rake who had mortgaged and lost both Sidon and Beaufort to the Hospitallers in the course of his extravagant and riotous living. Against the advice of his prudent Armenian father-in-law he had gone on ill-planned raid into the Bekaa, provoking a hornets' nest of Mongol reprisals which ruined him. His adulterous love affair with the high-living Isabel d'Ibelin, Lady of Beirut and Queen Dowager of Cyprus, caused a scandal which rocked the courts of Outremer. Princess Euphemia's granddaughter and namesake, Euphemia of Sidon and Beaufort, again recovered the family's Armenian orientation by marrying Baron Hethum V of Lampron-Asgouras, Lord of Simanglâ and Marshal of Armenia, who died in 1307.

Another of the Armeno-Lebanese marriages produced a Pretender to the throne in the person of Philip de Montfort, Lord of Tyr, when Philip contracted a matrimonial alliance with no less a person than Marie of Antioch-Armenia<sup>18</sup>, daughter of Raymond-Rupen, Lady of Toron and Belindas and proclaimed himself King-Consort of Armenia. But Philip was killed in Tyr in 1270 by the Assassins, carrying out orders of the Mamluk Sultan Baibars, before he could press his claims. Nevertheless, his son Rupen, Lord of Tyr and Beirut, carried on the Armenian tradition through his granddaughter, Eschiva, who married Peter I of Cyprus and added her claims to his when barons of the « Latin » party proclaimed him King of Armenia and Lord of Korikos in the Cypriote-held port of Korikos in 1368, just before his assassination, as he was preparing an expedition to Armenia's capital, Sis.

In summation, we have no less than ten Armenian princesses who became the wives of the great Crusader lords of Lebanon and whose part-Armenian descendents, whether they married back into Armenia or continued in Lebanon and Cyprus were always

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17. Rudt, Table III a (H3); Rohricht, p. 1202.

18. Rudt, Table I (Rup), p. 55.



conscious of their Armenian heritage and dimension. It was this fact that impelled the writer, when compiling a book on Crusader Lebanon and discovering some of these Armenian ladies among his own Crusader ancestors, to write this short study, as a descendent in the 24th generation of Alix of Lampron, as well as of the princesses Doleta, Euphemia and Maria of the Rupenids and Hethumid-Rupenids of the brave little Kingdom of Sissouan.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF THE TEN PRINCESSES, 1186-1312

1. Doleta, (daughter of Prince Stephen, son of Leo I) married Bertrand de Giblet in 1186.
2. Alix (daughter of Prince Rupen III) married Count Raymond III of Tripoli in 1189.
3. Maria (daughter of Vahan of Korikos and Princess Euphemia Saven-Pahlavouni) married Philip d'Ibelin of Beirut (died before 1212).
4. Marie d'Antioch-Armenia (daughter of Co-King Raymond Rupen I) married Philip of Montfort, Lord of Tyr, in 1240.
5. Kalamaria (daughter of Grand Baron Constantine and sister of King Hethum I) married John d'Ibelin of Beirut Count of Jaffa, before 1241.
6. Euphemia (daughter of King Hethum I) married Julien de la Sayette et Beaufort, Lord of Sidon, in 1252.
7. Sibel (daughter of King Hethum I) married Bohemond VI of Antioch, Count of Tripoli, in 1254.
8. Maria (daughter of King Hethum I) married Guy d'Ibelin of Beirut, in 1266.
9. Alix of Lampron (daughter of Hethum IV of Lampron, son of the Thakadir (« Prince of Princes ») Constantine and of the « Princess of Princesses ») married Bailen d'Ibelin of Beirut Regent of Cyprus, in 1279; died in 1312.
10. Zabel (another granddaughter of the Prince of Princes, Constantine) of Lampron-Asgouras, married Philip d'Ibelin of Beirut, Senechal and Regent of Cyprus, c. 1290.



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(1186 – 1312 թթ․)

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(Ամփոփում)

Արեւելի մէջ հաստատուած խաչակիր իշխանապետութիւնները, Հայկական Կիլիկիոյ հետ իրենց ստեղծած քաղաքական, զինուորական եւ ընկերային յարաբերութեանց զուգահեռ, մասն խնամիական կապեր կը հաստատեն: 1186 թ․էն մինչեւ 1312 թ․ը երկարող ժամանակաշրջանի ընթացքին, Լիբանանի տարբեր քաղաքներու՝ Թրիփուլիի, Պէյրութի, Ճպէյլի, Սայտայի եւ Սուրի մէջ հաստատուած խաչակիր իշխանական տուները, Կիլիկիոյ Ռուբինեան եւ Հեքուսեան հարստութիւններուն, ինչպէս մասն հայկական աւատապետական այլ տուներու հետ իրենց ունեցած խնամիական կապերուն շնորհիւ, տասը հալ իշխանուհիներ կը հաշուեն իրենց պալատներուն մէջ: