

Gerard Dedeyan, *Les Arméniens en Chypre (577-1211) de Justin II À Hugues 1er de Lusignan*, Centre de Recherche Scientifique, Sources et Études de l'Histoire de Chypre, Nicosia, 2018, 302 pages.

The book that I am about to present constitutes one of the most ambitious pieces of historical research ever undertaken into the history of Cyprus. While there are a number of articles and books in print about the Armenian community of Cyprus, nearly all of them focus on its presence on the island during the Late Ottoman and British Colonial period. By contrast, this monograph examines the presence of Armenians in Cyprus from the late sixth century until the early Lusignan period. Extending all the way from the period of Late Antiquity to the beginning of the High Middle Ages, this book can be considered without the slightest hint of exaggeration as a first of its kind. Before describing the book and its purpose, however, a few words about the author himself are in order.

Gerard Dedeyan, a French national who is also ethnically Armenian, was a Professor of Medieval History at the University of Montpellier in southern France and is currently Professor Emeritus as well as a member of the Centre of Medieval Studies at the same institution. He is a specialist in the relations that the Armenians in the Middle Ages developed with the Byzantines, the Franks, as West Europeans were called in the Middle Ages, the Georgians and the Syrian Christians. His two-volume monograph on the Armenians among Greeks, Muslims and Crusaders, titled *Les Arméniens entre Grecs, Musulmans et Croisés* and published in 2003, was awarded the Gustav Schlumberger Prize by the French Académie des Belles Lettres. He is also the editor of a comprehensive history of the Armenian people from Antiquity to the present day, the *Histoire du peuple arménien*, published in 2007 to celebrate the year of Franco-Armenian friendship, and is currently a member of three learned societies: the Academy of Sciences and Letters of Montpellier, the Academy of Sciences and Letters of Outre Mer, that is of the Latin East, and an overseas member of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia.

His present volume, the fruit of years of painstaking research into the history of the Armenian presence on Cyprus, traces the Armenians' history on Cyprus itself while never losing sight of the wider historical context. It covers the period from the earliest Armenian presence to the first decades of the Lusignan dynasty resulting from the conquest of Cyprus by King Richard I of England in 1191 and its sale in 1192 to Guy de Lusignan, the dynasty's founder. Sixth century Cyprus was a province of the Byzantine Empire, as the Roman Empire in the east is now called. During the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries the empire experienced territorial losses that reduced it to a quarter of its former size. The Muslim Arabs overran Syria, Egypt and North Africa while the

Avars and Slavs overran the Balkans. The empire, reduced to little more than Asia Minor, had lost considerable revenues and population along with territory, and so emigration was welcome, providing peasants to till the soil and soldiers to man the armies. Armenians peopled the remaining territories of the empire from eastern Asia Minor to the shores of the Adriatic Sea, and began to arrive in Cyprus in the second half of the sixth century. Dedeyan discusses the settlement of Armenians on Cyprus from Asia Minor and beyond over a period of more than six centuries, and one of the great merits of his book is that he places the various instances of settlement within the broader train of events of Byzantine, Muslim and crusader history. In this way he shows vividly and convincingly that the history of Armenian settlement on Cyprus is interrelated with historical developments taking place throughout the eastern Mediterranean and even beyond.

Dedeyan first mentions the transfer to Cyprus of Armenian populations under Emperor Maurice from the Aghdzenik area of south-eastern Asia Minor in the late sixth century, underlining the importance of the Armenian heavy cavalry in combatting the Avar invaders of the Balkans at this time. He outlines the strategic importance Cyprus had for Maurice's successor, the Emperor Heraclius, who was himself possibly a descendant of the Armenian Arsacids. Heraclius used Cyprus as a staging post for seizing Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, from the Emperor Phocas, who had usurped the throne. He also used it as a base for marshalling forces against the Persians who had overrun Asia Minor. He does not lose sight of the fact that most Armenians as Miaphysites, although Christians, were heterodox in Byzantine eyes. Following the Council of Chalcedon held in 451 both Roman Catholics and Greeks accepted the doctrine of Christ as having one person but two natures. Among the Armenian dissenters was one Paul the 'Headless', an Armenian of Cyprus leading those on Cyprus opposed to Chalcedonian doctrines. He was described as headless in common with other unyielding Monophysites who refused to accept Chalcedonian Christianity. Although Patriarch Sergios, the Greek patriarch of Constantinople, attempted to bring him round to the Chalcedonian viewpoint in letters sent to him in 622-623, he was unsuccessful. Dedeyan makes it clear that, although serving the Byzantine Empire, the Armenians guarded their ecclesiastical and doctrinal independence jealously.

In his study Dedeyan makes use of Latin, Greek and Arabic historical sources besides Armenian ones. He stresses that during the period of neutrality lasting from ca. 680 to 976, when Cyprus was in effect a militarily neutral territory paying taxes to both Byzantines and Arabs, the Cypriots were regarded in Muslim Arab eyes as having signed a *pactum*, that is an agreement, outlining their rights and obligations in relation to the Muslim Arabs. Dedeyan observes how various Arab writers saw parallels between the obligations Muslims had

towards the Cypriots and similar obligations they had towards the Armenians of Arabissos, located in the area of Asia Minor with an Armenian population. The Byzantine presence in Cyprus was strengthened in this period of military neutrality, which did not preclude the arrival on Cyprus of administrators from Constantinople, by the appointment of the ethnic Armenian Alexis as governor of the island for a period of seven years during the 870s. The governor in question, mentioned as being of Armenian origin by the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his work titled *de thematibus*, a description of the military districts of the Byzantine Empire, has been identified by the Armenian historian Hratch Bartikian as Alexios Mousele, a member of a prominent Armenian family serving the Byzantine state. It is possible that this governor installed Armenian settlers in the Paphos district, where to this day there exists the village of Mousere 5 km. to the northeast of the locality of Archimandrita.

Despite the official neutrality of Cyprus, Armenians from adjacent Byzantine Asia Minor continued to be settled there. Some of the Armenian troops participating in a failed Byzantine expedition against Crete in 911 originated from the locality of Platanion in central Asia Minor. They were apparently settled in Cyprus, bringing with them the name of their place of origin, now the Cypriot village of Platani in the eastern part of the Pentadaktylos mountain range. It is possible that Armenians originating from the locality of Priene in western Asia Minor were also settled on Cyprus in a locality called Prine, now disappeared but referred to as Briem in a letter of Pope Celestine III to Alan, the first Latin archbishop of Nicosia at the beginning of the Lusignan period. The settlement of Armenians in Cyprus continued after the island was reincorporated into the Byzantine empire in 976, following the successful conquest of Crete and of eastern Asia Minor by the emperors Nicephorus Phokas and John I Tsimiskes, the latter himself of Armenian origin. Under the Emperor John II Comnenus, who reconquered parts of the southern Anatolian coastline from the Armenians of the area and the Franks, the Armenian population of Tel-Hamdun in Northern Syria was transplanted to Cyprus in the years 1136-1137, as reported by the Arab historian of Damascus Ibn al Kalanisi.

Yet Armenians settling in Cyprus could originate from much further away than neighbouring Asia Minor. Dedeyan draws our attention to the village of Orounda in the Nicosia district. This name derives from the Arabic al-Rawandan, a locality on the river Euphrates in Mesopotamia colonised by Armenians during the Byzantine reconquest of the tenth century. During the period of the crusades this locality formed part of the county of Edessa, established by the Franks after the success of the First Crusade in 1099, and the Armenian family of Arouandanos, or Ravendel in its Frankish form passed into the service of the Frankish counts. Members of this family appear to have

settled in Cyprus and more specifically at Orounda. An icon of St. Nicholas in the church of the monastery St. Nicholas of the Roof, located about 20km. southwest of Orounda, is dateable to the end of the thirteenth century and depicts a donor whose shield bears the coat of arms of the Ravendel family. Not all the Armenian place names on Cyprus can be traced historically, but among them should be mentioned Arminou in the district of Paphos, Armenochori in the district of Limassol, Spatharikon and Kornokipos in the district of Famagusta and the locality of Armeni in the district of Larnaca. The Cypriot place names associated with the settlement of Armenians on Cyprus are given in an excellent and clearly outlined map of Cyprus in colour found on page 237 of the book.

Besides describing and analysing the settlement of Armenians in Byzantine and early Lusignan Cyprus, Dedeyan also discusses their activities on the island and their integration into the society of Cyprus. He cautions the reader against accepting the presence of Armenian merchants in Byzantine Cyprus as adopted in some recent Cypriot publications since there is no firm evidence to support such an idea, although published Genoese notarial deeds originating from Cyprus in the Lusignan period do attest conclusively to the presence and activities of Armenian merchants in fourteenth century Famagusta. The presence of Armenian mercenaries on Cyprus from the time of Isaac Comnenus, who arrived there from Cilicia in 1184 and seized power, is beyond doubt. The Old French chronicles of Ernoul and of Bernard the Treasurer written in the early thirteenth century attest that he brought Armenians from Cilicia to Cyprus with him. These Armenian soldiers probably originated from the western part of Cilicia, whose local Armenian Hethumid rulers were in alliance with Isaac against another aristocratic Armenian dynasty, the Rupenids.

The Armenians already established on Cyprus may also have supported Isaac, for by the time of his arrival they were sufficiently numerous and organised to have their own bishop. This bishop, named Tadeos, was one of the 33 Armenian prelates attending the Armenian church council at Hromgla, the seat of the Armenian catholicos, on the River Euphrates. The presence of Armenian monks on Cyprus is suggested by the condemnation of their fasting practices by the Greek Orthodox monk Neilos, the founder of the monastery of Makhairas, at the end of the twelfth century. Neilos specifically condemned the fasting practices during Lent of the followers of Artzibourios, who were apparently Armenians who kept a fast of bread and water every Monday and Wednesday during the three weeks preceding the main Lenten fast. Such a practice may have been brought over to Cyprus by Armenian monks based in the area of the Black Mountain near Antioch in northern Syria, an area not far from Cyprus by sea.

The Western chroniclers recounting the conquest of Cyprus by King Richard I of England in the course of the Third Crusade, which set out to regain Jerusalem following its conquest in 1187 by the Muslim ruler Saladin, specifically state that Isaac Comnenus opposed the king's landing at Limassol with Greek and Armenian forces in the summer of 1191. This is a clear indication that the Armenians remained loyal to Isaac throughout the seven years during which he ruled Cyprus. Dedeyan makes explicit the fact that these Armenians forces probably consisted of units known as *azat*, minor Armenian nobles and their retainers fighting on horseback and received villages and the revenues therefrom by way of reward. He suggests, moreover, that the villages Isaac Comnenus may have granted to the Armenians in his service possibly derived from the confiscations he carried out after arriving in Cyprus of lands belonging to the local Byzantine aristocrats opposed to him. This was done, along with taxing the clergy and the rest of the population, to raise money for his own mercenaries, who included Armenians, Normans from southern Italy, and mainland Greeks.

Despite participating in the resistance against King Richard, by the early thirteenth century the Armenians had become pro-Latin, largely because, as Dedeyan makes clear, of the rise of the Rupenid faction among the Armenian nobility of Cilicia. The Rupenid noble Leo was formally crowned King of Cilician Armenia in 1198 by the Roman Catholic bishop Conrad of Hildesheim, the representative of Pope Celestine III and the emperor Henry VI of Germany. Leo had sent Armenian forces to the Holy Land during the Third Crusade to assist the kings Richard I of England and Philip Augustus of France during the siege of Acre. This pro-western orientation of the Armenians of Cilicia directly impacted the Armenians in Cyprus. When encouraging settlers to come to Cyprus to reinforce his rule over the island, Guy de Lusignan, the first French ruler of Cyprus, sent emissaries to Cilician Armenia as well as to Syria and the Holy Land. The Armenian ruler Rupen III suggested the dispatch of 30,000 Armenian settlers to Cyprus when he met Aimery de Lusignan, Guy's brother and the first crowned king of Cyprus, during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This figure of 30,000, however, is a standard number appearing in other contexts of Armenian history in space and time, as Dedeyan shrewdly points out.

In terms of source material Dedeyan's book is enriched by recourse to sigillography as well as to written and iconographic sources such as the image of St. Nicholas discussed above. Making use of the two-volume corpus of Byzantine lead seals from Cyprus of the late Professor Michael Metcalf, in a separate chapter Dedeyan discusses the presence and activities of Armenian functionaries of the Byzantine Empire on Cyprus from the early eighth to the early ninth century. This is a period for which written and inscriptional evidence is sparse, making the testimony provided by the seals all the more useful,

although there are also seals from Cyprus recording Armenian officials during the later tenth and eleventh centuries. A useful set of photographs of the seals in question, both obverse and reverse, is given on pages 253-58 of the book. Ever aware of the role of the Armenians in Cyprus within a broader historical, geographical and cultural context, Dedeyan dedicates two chapters towards the end of his monograph to other national and religious groups that settled on Byzantine Cyprus, namely the Maronites and the Georgians. In the case of the former he emphasises how they had been marginalised by the other confessions of Eastern Christians and were ultimately incorporated by the incoming Franks, becoming members of the Roman Catholic Church, as they are to this day, although retaining a distinctive Arabic rite. In the case of the Georgians he stresses the predominantly monastic character of the community and how their monastic foundations enjoyed the patronage of the Bagratid kings of Georgia, although they continued well into the Lusignan period.

Not least among the engaging features of this book are the Armenian maps given in colour or in black and white at the end, maps printed in Armenian from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries and forming part of the Rouben Galician collection. The modern map of Cyprus in colour already mentioned, giving the locations of Armenian settlements on the island, also gives the location of the Maronite settlements, mainly in the northwest of Cyprus, with a chronology of these settlements given on the page immediately following. Genealogical tables together with maps of the Byzantine Empire and of the east Mediterranean basin during the crusades, taken from the works of Georg Ostrogorsky, Elisabeth Malamut, Claude Mutfian and the author himself, assist greatly in clarifying visually the numerous names of people and places given in the book. Readers examining the 20-page bibliography of this work will note that the source materials and secondary works include Armenian and the major languages of Europe, including Latin and Classical Greek. Last but not least, I should point out that the ANIV foundation in Russia is keen to obtain translation rights in order to publish this work in Armenian and Russian translation. If this eventually comes to pass, it will assist greatly in the book's overall dissemination throughout Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and the international Armenian diaspora.

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