ARMENIAN QUEENS OF JERUSALEM

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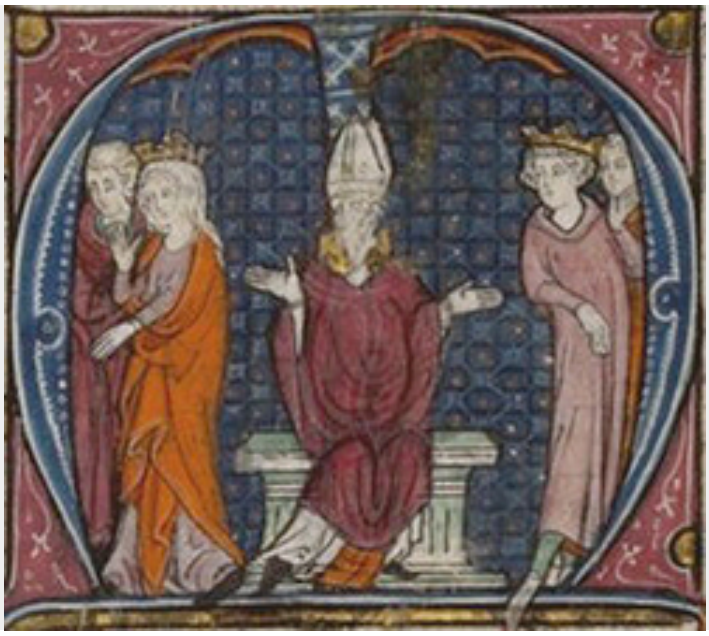

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Agnes of Courtenay (1136 – 1184 AD)

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Agnes was first married to Reynald of Marash at a very early age, but he was killed at the Battle of Inab in 1149, when she was no more than 15. They had had no children. Then she became engaged to Hugh of Ibelin, but Hugh was captured in battle with the Muslims in 1157. In 1157, Amalric, Count of Jaffa and Ascalon – the heir apparent of his brother King Baldwin III, married her, after forcibly abducting her, according to the Lignages d'Outremer.

Agnes bore Amalric three children, Sibylla (b. c. 1158-1160), Baldwin IV (b. 1161), and Alix or Alice, who died in childhood. Agnes and Amalric made their home in the royal court, where Queen Melisende acted as regent for her son Baldwin III while he was on campaign.

Soon after, their marriage had to be annulled because Amalric and Agnes were related through a common great grandfather, which is against the Christian tradition. However her children remained heirs to the throne. Amalric later married Maria Komnene, another Queen with Armenian ancestry (reed bellow).

Agnes attempted to remarry Hugh of Ibelin, but he died during a pilgrimage. She eventually married for the forth time to Reginald of Sidon in 1170. Agnes died in the spring of 1184 in her castle at Jaffa.

Maria Komnene Queen of Jerusalem (1154 – 1217 AD)

Maria was the daughter of John Doukas Komnenos, a Byzantine military governor in Cyprus, and Maria Taronitissa, a descendant of the ancient Armenian kings from Taron. She married King Amalric I of Jerusalem after his marriage to Agnes of Courtenay had been annulled. They had a daughter, Isabella, in 1172, and a stillborn child in 1173. Amalric was King of Jerusalem from 1163, and Count of Jaffa and Ascalon before his accession. As mentioned above, Amalric was the second son of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem. The marriage of Amalric and Maria was celebrated with much fanfare at Tyre, on 29 August 1167.

Almaric died in 1174 and on his deathbed he left Nablus (city in the Kingdom of Jerusalem) to Maria, who became Dowager Queen upon his death.

In 1177, Maria married secondly with Balian of Ibelin, who commanded the defense of Jerusalem against Saladin in 1187. She bore him at least four children:

1) Helvis of Ibelin, who married (1) Reginald of Sidon (widower of Agnes of Courtenay), and (2) Guy of Montfort

2) John of Ibelin, Lord of Beirut and constable of Jerusalem, who married Helvis of Nephin, then Melisende of Arsur

3) Margaret, who married (1) Hugh of Tiberias (stepson of Raymond III of Tripoli), and (2) Walter III of Caesarea

4) Philip of Ibelin, bailli (regent) of Cyprus, who married Alice of Montbéliard.

Maria's sister Theodora married Prince Bohemund III of Antioch, and her brother Alexios was briefly, in 1185, a pretender to the throne of the Byzantine Empire.

Sibylla Queen of Jerusalem (1160 – 1190 AD)

Sibylla was the daughter of the above mentioned King Amalric I of Jerusalem and his first wife the above mentioned Agnes of Courtenay. Thus, her Armenian ancestry is traced both through her

paternal lineage through Amalric the grandson of the Armenian princess Morphia of Melitene and her maternal lineage through Agnes of Courtenay the granddaughter of the Armenian princess Beatrice of Armenia.

Sibylla was raised by her great-aunt, the Abbess Ioveta of Bethany, sister of former Queen Melisende of Jerusalem, who founded the convent of St. Lazarus in Bethany for her sister in 1128, and died there in 1163. In the convent Sibylla was taught scripture and other church traditions. Sibylla married William Longsword of Montferrat, eldest son of the Marquess William V of Montferrat, and a cousin of Louis VII of France and of Frederick Barbarossa. William died the following year, leaving Sibylla pregnant. In the tradition of the dynasty, Sibylla named her son Baldwin. Sibylla did not remarry until 1180 when she married Guy of Lusignan. Sibylla bore Guy two daughters, Alice and Maria.

Sibylla was crowned queen by Patriarch Eraclius and she was crowned alone, as sole Queen. Before her crowning Sibylla agreed with oppositional court members that she would annul her own marriage to please them, as long as she would be given free rein to choose her next husband. The leaders of the oppositional court agreed, and Sibylla was crowned forthwith. To their astonishment, Sibylla immediately announced that she chose Guy as her husband, and crowned him.

Of Queen Sibylla's right to rule, Bernard Hamilton wrote:

"*there is no real doubt, following the precedent of Melisende, that Sibylla, as the elder daughter of King Amalric, had the best claim to the throne; equally, there could be no doubt after the ceremony that Guy only held the crown matrimonial*."

Sibylla had shown great cunning and political prowess in her dealings with the members of the opposition faction. Her chief concern was to check the progress of Saladin's armies as they advanced into the kingdom. Guy and Raymond were dispatched to the front with the entire fighting strength of the kingdom, but their inability to cooperate was fatal, and Saladin routed them at the Battle of Hattin on July 4, 1187. Guy was among the prisoners. The dowager queen joined her stepdaughter in Jerusalem as Saladin's army advanced. By September 1187, Saladin was besieging the Holy City, and Sibylla personally led the defense, along with Patriarch Eraclius and Balian of Ibelin, who had survived Hattin. Jerusalem capitulated on October 2, and Sibylla was permitted to escape to Tripoli with her daughters.

Guy was released from his imprisonment in Damascus in 1188, when Saladin realized that returning him would cause strife in the crusader camp and that Guy was a less capable leader than certain others who now held sway. The queen joined him when they marched on Tyre in 1189, the only city in the kingdom that had not fallen. Conrad of Montferrat, brother of Sibylla's first husband William, had taken charge of the city's defences. However, he denied them entrance, refusing to recognise Guy's claim to the remnant of the kingdom, and asserting his own claim to hold it until the arrival of the kings from Europe (in accordance with Baldwin IV's will). After about a month spent outside the

city's walls, the queen followed Guy when he led a vanguard of the newly arrived Third Crusade against Muslim-held Acre, desiring to make that town the seat of kingdom. Guy besieged the town for two years.

There, during the stalemate in July or August, possibly July 25, 1190, Sibylla died in an epidemic which was sweeping through the military camp. Her two young daughters had also died some days earlier. Acre was afterwards conquered in July 1191, mostly by troops brought by Philip II of France and Richard I of England.

Bernard Hamilton wrote:

"had Sibylla lived in more peaceful times she would have exercised a great deal of power since her husband's authority patently derived from her",

and that only the conquest by Saladin brought her rule to a speedy end. Her legal successor was her half-sister Isabella, but Guy refused to relinquish his crown until an election in 1192.

Sibylla was played by Eva Green in the Hollywood movie "Kingdom of Heaven".

Isabella I of Jerusalem (1172 – 1205 AD)

Isabella was the daughter of the above mentioned Queen Maria Komnene and King Amalric I of Jerusalem. Her Armenian ancestry can also be traced through both her maternal and paternal lineages. She had a total of seven children by her various husbands. She was Queen regnant of Jerusalem from 1190 until her death. By her four marriages, she was successively Lady of Toron, Marchioness of Montferrat, Countess of Champagne and Queen of Cyprus.

Isabella spent her early years in the court of her mother and stepfather Balian of Ibelin, mostly in Nablus. She was described by the poet Ambrose as "exceedingly fair and lovely"; according to the Muslim chronicler Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, she had black hair and a pale complexion. Unlike most of the western depictions of blond haired queens in the illuminated manuscripts, in reality most of them probably had dark hair.

In 1180, when Isabella was 8 (according to William of Tyre), she was betrothed to Humphrey IV of Toron, on the orders of her half-brother Baldwin IV, in payment of a debt of honour to Humphrey's grandfather Humphrey II who had been mortally wounded saving the king at Banias, and to remove her from the Ibelins' political orbit. They were married in 1183, when Humphrey was about 16 or 17 and Isabella 11.

Her supporters, notably her mother Maria and Balian of Ibelin, realized that she needed a suitable king – who was not her current husband. After much political pressure her first marriage was annulled and she was married off to Conrad of Montferrat who claimed the throne of the

kingdom. However, for seventeen months there was an interregnum during which Guy of Lusignan, despite the death of Sibylla, continued his claim. Guy's chief supporter was Richard I of England, his family's overlord in Poitou, while Isabella and Conrad's was Philip II of France, the son of Conrad's cousin Louis VII. Eventually, after Philip's departure, Conrad's kingship was confirmed by election in April 1192.

Conrad was later stabbed by Hashshashin (a secret order of Muslim assassins) in the street and died from his wounds. Isabella was already known to be carrying their first child – Maria of Montferrat, who later succeeded her mother as queen regnant.

Two days later, Henry of Champagne returned to Tyre as the envoy of his uncle King Richard – and immediately betrothed himself to Isabella. According to various accounts they married only 8 days after Conrad's murder.

Henry died in 1197 when a balcony or window-trellis gave way and he fell out of a window. He and Isabella had three daughters, Marie of Champagne (died as a child before 1205), Alice (born 1196) and Philippa (born 1197). After his death, Isabella was married for a fourth time to Amalric II of Jerusalem (also Amalric I of Cyprus), brother of Guy of Lusignan. They were crowned together as King and Queen of Jerusalem in January 1198 in Acre. They had two daughters, Sybilla (born 1198) and Melisende (born 1200), and one son, Amalric (1201–1205).

On her death on 5 April 1205, Isabella was succeeded as Queen of Jerusalem by her eldest daughter Maria of Montferrat

Maria of Montferrat (1192 – 1212 AD)

Maria of Montferrat (or Maria of Jerusalem) was Queen of Jerusalem, the daughter of above mentioned Isabella I of Jerusalem and Conrad of Montferrat. Maria became queen of Jerusalem, at the age of thirteen, after her mother Isabella died.

The half-brother of her mother, John of Ibelin, the Old Lord of Beirut, acted as regent on behalf of Maria, wisely and to the satisfaction of the inhabitants of the kingdoms. Failing to conduct operations to reconquer the territories lost in 1187, he maintained the kingdom within its limits, a policy of peace with Al-Adil I, brother of Saladin, who had come to his estate by eliminating the other heirs.

The regency expired in 1209, when Maria was seventeen, so the government believed it best for Maria to marry so she could secure her post as queen. The assembly of barons and prelates decided to seek advice from Philip II of France, who offered one of his followers, John of Brienne. However John was not a very rich man. To overcome his lack of fortune and to enable him to fund his sovereign obligations (court and army) King Philip and Pope Innocent III each paid him the sum of 40 000 livres.

The marriage was celebrated on September 4, 1210, then the couple were crowned King and Queen

of Jerusalem on October 3, 1210 in Tyre Cathedral. John continued the peace policy of John of Ibelin. In 1212, Maria of Montferrat gave birth to a daughter, Isabelle (1212–1228) or Yolande, but died shortly afterwards, probably from puerperal fever. John retained the crown but only as regent on behalf of his daughter.

Isabella II of Jerusalem (1212 – 25 April 1228)

Isabella II was born in Andria, in the southern Italian Kingdom of Sicily. She was the only child of the above mentioned Maria of Montferrat, Queen of Jerusalem, and John of Brienne.

Maria died shortly after giving birth to Isabella II in 1212, possibly by puerperal fever. Because of this, Isabella II was proclaimed Queen of Jerusalem when she was only a few days old. Because her father John did not have a direct claim to the throne, he ruled as regent.

Isabella II married to Frederick II, King of Germany and Sicily, who was heavily in support of the 5th and the 6th crusades. Isabella II was then crowned as Queen of Jerusalem.

The now crowned Queen arrived in Italy with twenty galleys sent by Frederick II to bring her with her father and married in person to Frederick II in the cathedral of Brindisi, on 9 November 1225. In the ceremony, he declared himself King of Jerusalem and immediately saw to it that his new father-in-law John of Brienne, the current regent of Jerusalem, was dispossessed and his rights transferred to him. The contemporary chronicles described the exotic wedding celebrations, which took place in the Castle of Oria, and the indignant reaction of her father John of Brienne, now without royal authority.

Despite his new capacity as King of Jerusalem, Frederick II put off his crusade, and in 1227, he was excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX for failing to honour his crusading pledge.

After the wedding, Isabella was kept in seclusion by her husband. She spent her time in Frederick's harem in Palermo. In November 1226, she gave birth to her first child, a daughter (referred to by some sources as Margaret); the baby died in August 1227. Frederick finally sailed from Brindisi on 8 September 1227 for Jerusalem but fell ill at Otranto, where Louis IV, Landgrave of Thuringia, had been put ashore. Frederick postponed the journey while he recovered. In the meantime Isabella died after giving birth to her second child, a son, Conrad, in Andria, Italy, on 25 April 1228. She is buried in Andria Cathedral. Frederick finally embarked to Jerusalem on 28 June.

Although he crowned himself as King of Jerusalem in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on 18 March 1229, he ruled as regent on behalf of his son, settling a truce with the Muslims in 1229 during the Sixth Crusade.

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The last two Queens of Jerusalem had rather distant Armenian ancestry, nevertheless they too

carried Armenian blood within their veins from marriages of their ancestors that preceded them during early ages of the kingdom. And so through these various intermarriages, many kings of Jerusalem had also inherited Armenian blood.

Marriages between Frankish lords and Armenian nobility were quite frequent in other parts of the Crusader states as well, like the marriage between Joscelin I, Count of Edessa and an Armenian noblewoman named Beatrice, daughter of Constantine I of Armenia or the marriage of Amalric, a son of Hugh III of Cyprus who married Isabella, daughter of Leo II of Armenia, etc…

Thus looking back at the intriguing history of the kingdom of Jerusalem we see that the Armenian bloodline was very much present in the Holy kingdom.