INTERMARRIAGE, VIOLENCE AMONG THE CILICIAN NOBILITY

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By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 16 July 2016

Threatened by Muslim--mostly Turkic forces--the Cilicia Armenian royalty and the Crusaders made natural allies. Although their relationship was sometimes fraught because of Crusader mendacity, in time the alliance lead to frequent dynastic intermarriage between the east and the west.

Among the more famous of these intermarriages were those of Princesses Arda, Morphia and Melisende to European nobility ruling the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. Arda, the daughter of Toros/Tatoul, lord of Marash, married King Baldwin of Jerusalem thus becoming the first Crusader queen of Jerusalem. The second Crusader queen of Jerusalem was Morphia, daughter of Prince Gabriel of Melitine/Malatya. She married King Baldwin de Bourg. The third queen of Jerusalem was Melisende. She was the daughter of Baldwin de Bourg and Morphia. She married Count Fulk of Anjou. After sharing the Jerusalem throne with her husband, she became sole ruler when her husband was killed in a hunting accident. Wise and beautiful Queen Melisende was the most prominent woman of the Crusader era.

In addition to Armenian marriages to the Crusaders, there were also nuptial connections between the Armenian royalty and the Byzantines and the Tatars. Here's an incomplete list of these couplings:

- One of Hetoum II's daughters married Khan Ghazan of the Tatars.
- King Smpad I had a Tatar concubine offered to him by a Tatar khan. His wife was Isabel, the daughter of Guidon Iblenian, a Crusader.
- Prince Gir Vart's daughter married Sultan Ala'eddin of Iconium.
- Prince Levon I married Mariam, the daughter of Emperor Isaac Comnenus of Byzantium.
- Prince Levon I's second wife was part-Armenian. She was the daughter of Urfa's Count Baldwin and Arda.
- King Roupen II married Isabel, the daughter of Humphrey, the Crusader governor of Kerak (now in Jordan).
- King Levon II married Princess Zablun of Antioch and then to Sybil, the daughter of King Amorey of Cyprus.
- King Toros I married Princess Margaret, the daughter of King Hugo of Cyprus.
- King Oshin I's second marriage was to Hovanna, the daughter of Emperor Philip of Byzantium.
- King Levon IV married Agnes-Mariam, the daughter of Amorey, the governor of Sur in modern day Lebanon.
- King Levon V married Princess Eleonara-Constanza, the daughter of King Frederick of Sicily.
- Dalida, the daughter of Baron Stepan, married Governor Beltrand of Jibleh.
- Princess Phillipa, the daughter of King Roupen II, married Emperor Theodore Lascar of Nicea.
- Princess Stepania Emilia, niece of King Hetoum I, married King Henry of Cyprus.
- Princess Mariam, the sister of King Hetoum I, married John Iblenian, governor of Jaffa.

- Princess Sibyl, the daughter of King Hetoum I, married Behemond VI, Prince of Antioch.
- Princess Mariam, the daughter of King Hetoum I, married Senechal Guy Iblenian of Cyprus.
- Princess Fimee, the daughter of King Hetoum I, married Governor Julian of Sidon in modern-day Lebanon.
- Princess Zabloun, the daughter of King Levon III, married Governor Amorey of Sidon. He was the brother of the king of Cyprus.
- Princess Rita, the daughter of King Levon III, married Emperor Michael Andronicus of Byzantium.
- Alidz, the daughter of Hetoum of Lampron, married Senechal Philip Iblenian of Cyprus.
- King Levon VI, the last king of Cilicia, had no Armenian blood. He retired in France after years of imprisonment and later house arrest in Egypt. He was released when several European kings paid the ransom to free him. He was pensioned by the king of France and lived in the king's palace. His wife and daughter were buried in the St. James Armenian Church in Jerusalem. King Levon VI had two children in his last years. The mother of the children was French.

Violence Among Cilician Rulers

Because of their ingrained warrior ethos and the constant threats in the rough neighbourhood where they had established a new Armenia the Cilician royalty was tough as nails and as prone to violence as their non-Armenian contemporaries. Balancing their tiny state between various encroaching empires, the invading Seljuk Turks, the sultans of Egypt and the unscrupulous-greedy Crusaders demanded not only shrewd diplomacy but also a readiness to resort to violence.

- Constantin II, the son of King Toros, was poisoned by traitors.
- Constantin, the son of King Levon, was blinded by his brother.
- Roupen II, the son of King Toros II, was poisoned in the Hromgla Castle, probably by King Mleh.
- King Mleh was killed by his princes.
- King Smpad drowned his brother Toros and blinded his other brother Hetoum.
- Baron Oshin strangled Princess Zabel, the sister of King Oshin.
- Baron Oshin was executed by the order of King Levon V.
- Catholicos Krikor Dgha accused King Levon V of killing several prominent nobles.

While the above colourful characters and their often violent entanglements can provide great raw material for historical novels, there have been a mere handful of novels ("Toros Levoni", "Asbed Libarid") about "Little Armenia" and its nobility. While Armenian rule was a blip in the expanse of history, it's useful to remember that it lasted 300 years…the United States is 240 years old and Canada celebrates its 150th birthday next year.