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► **To cite this version:**

Cécile Khalifa. What were the true form and intent of Mamluks politics in Cyprus?. 2020. hal-02561966

HAL Id: hal-02561966

<https://hal.science/hal-02561966>

Submitted on 4 May 2020

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What were the true form and intent of Mamluks politics in Cyprus?

By C.I Khalifa-Guidt

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C.I Khalifa-Guidt dedicated her studies to Cyprus and the medieval period of the Lusignan in the island of Cyprus. Coming from the University of Cyprus and Montpellier, she is specialized in the field of Medieval War and she considers herself a Military Historian.

Among her recent publications are:

_ “Échanges entre Saladin et Guy de Lusignan d’après la chronique de Léontios Machairas”, *Premier Congrès du Gis*, Paris, 2015.

_ “Échive de Montbéliard et Charlotte de Lusignan : Deux femmes issues de l’élite, impliquées dans la défense de l’île de Chypre, au XIIIe et XVe siècle”, *Elites chrétiennes et formes du pouvoir en Méditerranée centrale et orientale (XIIIe-XVe siècle)*, Nîmes, 2015.

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Abstract: This project aims to produce an article about the history of the relationship that existed between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Lusignan of Cyprus. After the conquest of Cyprus in 1426, King Janus paid tribute to the Mamluks. After Janus was taken to Cairo he had to pay a ransom in order to return to Cyprus. However, the nature of the tribute paid by Lusignan after this episode has yet to be scrutinized. These studies should enable us to answer the question about Mamluk's installation in Cyprus. We need to determine if there were attempts to colonize Cyprus and if not, why the Sultans did not opt for colonization.

Historical artefacts found on the island including an ornate mirror found in a monastery, whose precise origin is yet to be defined, bring up new leads on the Mamluk's choices of conquering Cyprus. Various objects and artefacts traded and bought during exchanges between Mamluks and Syria were probably designed especially for the Cypriot market. Finding such a mirror, adorned with mysterious engravings, on the island hints towards a steady and flourishing flow of artefacts destined for either particular usage or in the framework of markets. Studying the nature of the tribute claimed by the Mamluks to Cyprus can allow us to better understand the nature of the administration set by them after the conquest, as well as shed new light on their political goals and what set the conquest of Cyprus apart from their other annexations.

Introduction:

The Mamluks, former slaves of the Ayyubids, took power in Egypt in 1250. Until 1517, they controlled a sultanate that included the geographical area called Bilad-Al-Sham, as well as Egypt, and Cyprus, after the conquest of this kingdom in 1426.

This article will develop the Mamluks' points of view, objectives and governance of the island of Cyprus based on the diplomacy and diplomatic exchanges and trade of artefacts, starting from the 15th century. During their sultanate, the Mamluks produced many detailed reports which allowed us to obtain information about their society, their civil and domestic organization, and the organization of their territory. These reports, called *Mahdar*, as Stephan Conerman explains in the book he published, depict the bureaucratic device of the Mameluke Sultanate.¹

First, it is necessary to depict the situation of the Mediterranean East in the 15th century, while the kingdom of Cyprus lived under threat of the Mamluks.

The conquest of the island happened during a period of tension caused by constant raids and ransacking of the Syrian coasts by the Cypriots. The Cypriot king didn't rein in the noblemen of his island leading those attacks, as they were driven by the economical need for a workforce to tend to their estates and lands.

Another important point is the details of the tribute requested by the Mamluks in 1426 and what composed it, to assess if that merchandise was reserved for a specific use on the Egyptian markets. Such items or products made in Syria may also have found their way to Cyprus.

The Mediterranean East, in which Cyprus is situated, is recognized as an area of passage and communication, strewn with maritime networks. It is a vector of trade and merchandise ships leaving and stopping over in the ports of the east convenient to the maritime trade. Maritime Republics, such as Genoa and Venice, experienced a commercial expansion in the East in the 15th century, an expansion undertaken in the 18th century. These two republics possessed trading posts in Mediterranean and Aegean islands. Several documents reached us concerning the commercial expansion of these estates, particularly the acts of the Italian notaries settled in these islands, revealing transactions between private individuals, about various trades.

¹*History and Society During the Mamluk Period (1250-1517): Studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Research College I.*, ed. S. Connerman Vol. 5. V&R unipress GmbH, Bonn 2014.

These acts allow us to understand sales networks woven by the Genoese and Venetian traders, in particular in Cyprus and to understand what interests the island represents in terms of the commercial interests of the Venetians and Genoese in Cyprus and if they were partially connected to the culture of the sugar cane developed on this island since almost two centuries. Following the conquest of Cyprus by Barsbay in 1426, the Mamluks required a tribute to the King of Cyprus. After the conquest, the King recognized the sultans as overlords of the island of Cyprus. Sugar was one of the elements of the tribute due to the Mamluks. We must determine whether the Cypriot and/or the Syrian sugar productions were commonly sold on the Egyptian markets. Our goal is to propose hypotheses and answers concerning the administration of Cyprus by the Mamluks in the 15th century. Recently, several studies shed new light on the subject, arguing about the word of diplomacy in the 15th century and studying in particular elements of the tribute and the diplomatic relations between both states. Although these studies are useful to understand the development of the conquest and the position of Mamluks politics in Cyprus, they do not go farther into the matter of a possible settlement of the Mamluks in Cyprus in light of the importance diplomacy had for them or not.

The main objective here is to determine the true intent of the Mamluks in conquering the island, and why they did not settle definitely once it was conquered.

Our study takes place under the reign of Barsbay (1422-1437), the conquest of Cyprus in 1426 being the high feat of arms of its reign. This one was studied in a masterful way by Ahmad Darrag, in the exhaustive monograph he proposed and which is still a recognized reference today.

Studies relative to the Mamluks knew considerable development in the second period of the last century. Studies focused on the former slaves of the Ayyubids have developed in particular in Chicago, where the Middle East Documenter Center produced a review including essential articles to learn about this period. Historians like P.M Holt and David Ayalon contributed to this advance by proposing varied studies on the diplomacy or the foundation of the society.²

² For general knowledge about Mameluke Society: Loiseau, J., *Les Mamelouks (XIIIe-XVIe siècle) Une expérience du pouvoir dans l'islam médiéval*, Seuil 2014. We recommend also: Minervini, L., *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro (1243-1314). La caduta degli Staticrociani nel racconto di un testimone oculare*, Liguori, 2000. Darrag, A., *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay*, thèse principale pour le doctorat ès lettres présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Paris, Damas 1961. Ayalon, D., "Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army – I", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London Vol. 15, No. 2, 1953, pp. 203-228. Holt, P.M., "The Treaties of the Early Mamluk Sultans with the Frankish States", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London Vol. 43, No. 1, 1980, pp.67-76. Behrens-Abouseif, D.,

The relations of Cyprus and the sultanate Mameluke, specifically the conquest by Barsbay in 1426 is a key aspect to understanding today's subject and has been evoked under various aspects by Nicolas Coureas and Mohammed Ouerfelli. Mohammed Ouerfelli realized a particularly important study to understand the evolution of diplomatic contacts between the Cyprus and the sultanate Mameluke, whereas Nicholas Coureas evokes several economic aspects, consecutive to the conquest of Barsbay. These articles are important as reminders of the general lines of the history of diplomatic relations between both. They also help us to understand the main perceptions of Cyprus under the Mameluke suzerainty.³

While Mohammed Ouerfelli's article lists the diplomatic contacts before the battle of Chirochitia in 1426, our work begins with the study of the battle. Embassies are sent the day of the fight, which highlights a will of the Mamluks to preserve contact with King Janus 1st to the end. The king, badly advised by inexperienced knights, refused any dialogue to try to stand out through strength. All of these facts are revealed by a Cypriot Chronicler, Léontios Machairas, who was a player in this battle.⁴

The conquest of Cyprus as well as the conquest of the throne by Jacques II of Lusignan in 1460 are very well documented, thanks to many Muslims writers. For the Muslim writers who inform us of the conquest of Barsbay, Yehoshuah Frenkel provides us precious information about them. If Salih Ibn Yahya and Shāhin Al-Zāhirī fully depict the details of the conquest of Cyprus by Barsbay, other chroniclers provide extensive documentation about the move of the Mamluks in Cyprus since the middle of the 15th century⁵. We can note that Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Biqā'ī as well as Hajar Al-Isqalanī relate the naval reports of the expedition in Cyprus by the sultanate.⁶

“Ibn Hajar Al-Isqalanī appended to this short account a personal war-report that his student Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Al-Biqā'ī's, one of the participants in this amphibious operation, had

Practicing Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World, London, 2014.

³Coureas, N., “Losing the War but winning the Peace: Cyprus and Mamluk Egypt in the Fifteenth Century”, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk eras* T1, 2013, 351-362. Coureas, N., “The tribute paid to the Mamluk Sultanate, 1426-1517: The perspective from Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus”, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk eras* T1, 2013, 363-380. Ouerfelli, M., “Les relations entre le royaume de Chypre et le sultanat mamelouk au XVe siècle”, *Le Moyen Âge*, Bd. 110, 2004, 327-344.

⁴*Une histoire du doux pays de Chypre : traduction du manuscrit de Venise de Leontios Machairas par Isabelle Cervellin-Chevalier*. Volume publié sous la direction d'Andréas Chatzivas. Éd. Praxandre ; Nancy : Institut d'études néo-helléniques, 2002.

⁵ Al-Zāhirī, *Zubdatkashf al-mamālik*, ed. R. Ravaisse, Paris 1894, 136-7, tr. Venture de Paradis, Beirut 1950.

Salih Ibn Yahya, *L'histoire familiale des émirs du Gharb*, ed. L. Cheiko, Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale, Beyrouth 1906.

⁶Hajar Al-Isqalanī, *Ibn, Inbā' al-ghumr bi-abnā' al-'umr*, ed. al-Bukhārī 1967.

provided him. An annotated translation of this report forms the major part of the present article.⁷”

Greek chroniclers provide us military information about the Mamluks and then how they acted in Cyprus. Leontios Machairas and George Boustronios are our main sources to depict the suzerainty of the Mamluks on the island. Leontios Makhairas, born at the end of the 14th century, was a Melkite Syrian from Cyprus. In his depiction of his life at the time, he mentions that his father, Stavrinou Makhairas, was called several times by the Lusignan to advise them on administrative issues. He wrote a chronicle on the history of Cyprus, while afterwards he made a career in administration. He was able to consult sources which did not reach us until the chronicle written by Jean de Mimars. Making a career in the Frankish administration, Leontios Makhairas was a member of oriental communities which made a career in the 15th century. He was a member of the new Latin elite rising from this century. To write his chronicles depicting with vivid details feats of arms like a precise account of the battle of Chirochitia he participated in, he was able to consult administrative documents, lost since.⁸

Angel Nicolaou Konnari has noted that Léontios Makhairas collected works covering philology and narrative, which did attract many researchers studying various fields.⁹

Catia Galatoriotou includes the census of the first critics of the Exegesis as being the most important work of the chronicler Leontios Machairas. The information gathered on Chirochitia can be considered as being different from a chronicle and rather tend towards a historical account of the events. Indeed, while R. Dawkins considers the Exegesis to be a combination of elements typical of a chronicle, Catia Galatoriotou states that the account of the Battle of Chirochitia matches the historical genre.¹⁰

Georges Boustronios was a Greek Chronicler, born in the 15th century. He was a member of the Frankish military administration in the 15th century. Captain of Salines, he wrote a chronicle written in an impersonal way, depicting only the facts he witnessed. Unlike Léontios Makhairas, Georges Boustronios did not reveal his personal feelings in his papers

⁷Frenkel, Y., “Al-Biqā’r’s Naval War-Report”, art.cit.,5.

⁸*Une histoire du doux pays de Chypre : traduction du manuscrit de Venise de Leontios Machairas par Isabelle Cervellin-Chevalier. Volume publié sous la direction d’Andréas Chatzivas, éd. Praxandre ; Nancy : Institut d’études néo-helléniques, 2002.*

⁹Nicolaou-Konnari, A., "Apologists or Critics? The Reign of Peter I of Lusignan (1359–1369) Viewed by Philippe de Mézières (1327–1405) and Leontios Makhairas (ca. 1360/80–after 1432)." *Philippe de Mézières and His Age*. Brill, 2011, 359-401.

¹⁰Galatoriotou, C., Leontios Machairas ‘Exegesis of the Sweet Land of Cyprus’, in ‘The Sweet Land of Cyprus’. Papers Given in the Twenty Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1991 (Nicosia, 1993), 362-366.

and hid the fact that he sided with Jacques II rather than Queen Charlotte during their confrontation for the throne of Cyprus in 1460¹¹. Georges Boustronios is essential to know the military movements made on the ground of the island by the troops of Jacques II that he was able to obtain from the Sultan of Egypt. He describes the coming of emir Janibek and his troops. This chronicle can thus reveal the place where the Mameluke garrison had taken its districts and we can then verify if attempts to colonize Cyprus were even decided by the Mamluks. We can also approach the issue of the tribute with questions Mameluke diplomacy can help us to understand. It seems necessary to wonder what the place of sugar in the conquest of the island was in view of imports of this culture to Egypt. We have to ask ourselves the question of the role played by sugar in the conquest projects of the Sultanate. The environment of Cyprus allowing sugar to be farmed, the Sultanate maybe wanted to exploit it to strengthen the economy of the Mameluke state. The study of the tribute has also to teach us the place of metals of Cyprus in the requirements of the tribute. The Mameluke sultanate did not intend to seize the natural resources of Cyprus and to envisage them as considerable contribution towards the state's economy.¹² We have to understand why the mineral resources of Cyprus weren't a choice.

The State of Research about the conquest of Cyprus by the Mamluks:

One of the first authors who evoked the Conquest of Cyprus by the Mamluks was Ziada Mustafa who magisterially depicted the events of the conquest. Then, Ahmad Darrag in his study of Barsbay tried to define the causes and the chronology of the events of the conquest. Ahmad Darrag depicted the wrath of the sultan Barsbay toward the exaction of the Cyprus nobility against the Syrian coasts. It is the last point, which is developed by Nicholas Coureas and Mohamed Ouerfelli, in several studies.

Concerning Mamluks diplomacy, several studies were conducted by authors like Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Frederic Bauden and Philip M. Holt. They depicted several aspects of Mamluk diplomacy as the way they composed treaties, the different ways of writing toward countries who weren't in the Dar-al-Islam.¹³

¹¹Georges Boustronios, *A Narrative of the Chronicle of Cyprus, 1456-1489*, ed. Nicholas Coureas and Hans A. Pohlsander, Vol. 51. Cyprus Research Centre, 2005.

¹²Ziada, M., *The Mamluk Conquest of Cyprus in the Fifteenth Century*, 1934. Ouerfelli, M., *Le sucre : production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, Brill 2007.

¹³Behrens-Abouseif, D., *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World*, Vol.44, IB Tauris 2014. Pahlitzsch, J., *Mediators between East and West: Christians under Mamluk Rule*, *Islamic Law and Society*, 6, 1999, 69-96.

Peter Edbury was one of the first researchers to depict relations between Cyprus and the Mamluks. He questioned why Cyprus had not been attacked before the 15th century and prior to the events of 1426 and tried to bring answers. His hypothesis was that the state of the Mamluk navy didn't allow them to attack immediately when tensions started to grow. He quoted John Pryor's theory that climate and the state of the Mamluk flotilla were the main cause of the non invasion of Cyprus, noting that, still according to John Pryor, the Mamluks had given priority to the conquest of the Egyptian territories rather than the Cyprus Island¹⁴.

The interests of Cyprus under the Mamluks were analyzed economically first by Benjamin Arbel and then by Nicolas Coureas.¹⁵ Benjamin Arbel's intention was to study the part of Venetian merchants and entrepreneurs in economic relations between Cyprus and the Mamluks. The discussion about Cyprus came mainly from the tribute raised by the Venetians for the Mamluks after the retrocession of Cyprus to Venice. Standpoint of the Serenissima in the Mediterranean, the question was how the Venetians kept on paying the Mamluks and the end of the tribute.

Chapter one: Genesis

The genesis of this question starts with the island conquest by Barbsay in 1426. In order to understand why the iqta was enforced in the first place, we must study the diplomatic ties between the Cypriots and the Mamluks. The mameluk diplomacy has been studied in depth by Doris Nehrens-Abouseif, highlighting the cultural specificities of those exchanges country by country.¹⁶

Our postulate for the iqta started from the discovery of a mirror on Cyprus, a mirror that could not be precisely dated but which was adorned with mysterious writings. How could a mirror, obviously adorned with Arabic inscriptions, have been considered and worshipped as a religious relic in Cyprus? The established postulate was that it had been brought over by a Mameluk embassy after the conquest of the island. Those embassies should have been carefully scrutinized during the mameluk sovereignty, as the ambassadors' statues are a great clue to assess the extent of the political weight the island had.

As we stated, exchanges were constant between Cyprus and their Mamluks neighbours during the Frankish monarchy reign. Yet, once the island was conquered in the 15th century things

¹⁴Edbury, P., *The Lusignan kingdom of Cyprus and its Muslim neighbours*. Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 1993.

¹⁵Arbel, B., "The last decades of Venice's trade with the Mamluks: importations into Egypt and Syria", *Mamlûk Studies Review*, 8(2),2004, 37-86.

¹⁶Behrens-Abouseif, D., *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World*, Vol.44, IB Tauris 2014, 105-109.

changed drastically. With the help of Mohammed Ouerfelli's census on diplomatic contacts before Chirochtia's battle, we can keep on studying the interactions between the two factions even during and after the battle. From the ambassadors sent to negotiate the day of the battle to the retrocession of the island by Venice in 1489, the Mamluks intent of keeping ties and contacts with their new citizens was obvious. Yet King Janus, certainly badly advised by young, inexperienced knights, refused the dialogue and tried to establish himself by force.¹⁷ Diplomacy then led to tributes imposed by the Mamluks upon the Cypriots, and of which the mirror may have been a part. Benjamin Arbel has established a list of the merchandise requested by the Mameluk sultanate from Cyprus, listing even objects that could have been deemed as ludicrous if we do not take in account the mining resources available at the time¹⁸. In his most renowned article, Benjamin Arbel describes Venetians and Mamluks as two different economic systems constantly negotiating a shared geographical area around Egypt. The tribute requested by the Mamluks from Cyprus is scrutinized through the spectrum of relations between Venetia and the Sultanate.¹⁹

Benjamin Arbel used a list of all the merchandise found in the wreckages of the sunken Venetian and Cypriot ships at the end of the 15th century to tally a list of the most commonplace products found in the markets of the area and which could have been part of the tributes. Among those goods, ores sent to Egypt and Syria featured prominently but none of those were listed as part of the tributes, leaving us to question the mining resources available on Cyprus.²⁰

Currency flows between Cyprus and the mamluk territories is one of the most strategic issues of the tributes. Payment was requested in ducats; 5000 ducats according to the Amadi chronicle (an anonymous chronicle thus named after its owners name), while King Janus had to pay a 200,000 ducats ransom to insure his freedom.

A careful study of the shipments of precious metals to Venetia from other Mediterranean and Aegean ports allows us not only to draw a list of the resources and the money circulating towards and through the maritime republic, but also to examine the common points between

¹⁷Ouerfelli, M., "Les relations entre le royaume de Chypre et le sultanat mamelouk au XV^e siècle.", *Le Moyen Age* 110.2 (2004), 327-344.

¹⁸Benjamin, A., "Attraverso il Mediterraneo nel 1499: una nave veneziana naufragata a Cipro e il suo carico. Le vie del Mediterraneo." *Idee, uomini, oggetti (secoli XI-XVI)* (1997), 103-115.

¹⁹Arbel, B., "The last decades of Venice's trade with the Mamluks: importations into Egypt and Syria", *Mamlûk Studies Review*, 8(2) (2004), 37-86.

²⁰Arbel, B., "The last decades...", *art.cit.*, 43-44.

the trade activities of Beirut and Tripoli with cities like Famagusta. Such exchanges were heavily supported by the Serenissima's "middlemen", like Emmanuele Piloti.²¹

Benjamin Arbel was one of the first to study Beirut's galleys travelling to Alexandria in 1502, and the Alexandrian galley's journeys of March 1503 and 1511 with their shipments of metals. In his appendix, he gives out an estimate of the shipment's value, deepening interrogations about why the Mamluks didn't exploit Cyprus's mineral resources.²²

Ibn Hajar gives out great details about the tribute, pointing out that the mamluk sultan demanded 2000 "camlets" (camel's saddle ornaments) as well as 20,000 dinars to be part of the tribute.

Sugar is also a big part of the tribute. Sugar is one of the first resources farmed off the Cyprus Island by the Venetian merchants. From the Kolossical maintained like a giant farm by the Hospitaliers during the 14th century to the many Venetian families, like the Corner, that feuded to control it, sugar production remained a major asset on the island.²³

For a few years now, the market of sugar on the island, from culture to refining and trade, has been studied in depth. Various archaeological missions conducted on the island have allowed the discovery of various agricultural domains being sugar, grown and refined for various uses. Anthony Luttrell, Mohamed Ouerfelli, Marina Solomidou-Ieronymidou, as well as Louise Von Wartburg have written studies and articles on Cypriot sugar farming. One may then wonder if Cypriot sugar wasn't mass bought by the Egyptians thanks to its cheaper price, to be distributed in Cairo's or other big city's markets. Marina Solomidou-Ieronymidou's works reveal the early monopoly set by the Venetians on the whole Cypriot sugar production²⁴.

It is important to note that in 1361 Pierre de Lusignan the First paid a visit to Federico Corner, strengthening the ties between the Venetians and the Cypriots and ultimately leading to the last Venetian queen of Cyprus, Catherine Cornaro (1474-1489).

Two facts should be the focus of our attention regarding the significance of sugar in the tribute. First, on the 26th of May 1429, two envoys from the Cyprus king pledged the whole

²¹*Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti sur le Passage en Terre Sainte (1420)*, (Publications de l'Université Lovanium de Léopoldville, 4), éd. P-H Dopp, Louvain/Paris, 1958.

²²Arbel, B., *The Port Towns of the Levant in Sixteenth-Century Travel Literature*, ed. A. Cowan, "Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400-1700", (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2000), 151-164.

²³Ouerfelli, M., *Le sucre : production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, Brill (2007), 102-116. Wartburg, M. L. V., "Production de sucre de canne à Chypre", *Coloniser au Moyen Age*, eds. M. Balard et A. Ducellier, Paris: A. Colon (1996), 126-31.

²⁴Luttrell, A., "The sugar industry and its importance for the economy of Cyprus during the Frankish period." *The development of the Cypriot economy*, Nicosia (1996), 163-173. Ieronymidou-Solomidou, M., "Sugar Mills and Sugar Production in Medieval Cyprus", *Medieval Cyprus - a place of cultural encounter*, eds. M. Grunbachtet S. Rogge, Schriften des Instituts für Interdisziplinäre Zypern-Studien / 11, Munster 2015, 147-174. Von Wartburg, M-L., "The archaeology of cane sugar production: a survey of twenty years of research in Cyprus", *Antiquaries Journal* 81, 2001, 305-335.

harvest of sugar of the royal estates in an attempt to earn the support of Venetia. This allows us to take the full measure of the sugar production of the island during the 15th century and this, despite the captivity of King Janus. Then, another agreement drawn between the king of Cyprus Jean de Lusignan the Second and Jacopo Acciaiuoli, an envoy of the Rhodes grandmaster, states that the king will have to pay 40 cantars a year to pay off his debts.²⁵

Sugar and salt were two components of the tribute, along with fabrics woven on the island of Cyprus. The rise of the textile industry during the 15th century was certainly spurred on by the Mamluks and tribute requirements.

From 1423 and starting with the reign of Barsbay, sugar production in Egypt underwent drastic changes. The new sultan claimed a monopoly on all sugar cultivation. The first restrictions of sugar cooking were enacted in 1423 and from that moment sugar was sold at 4000 dinhars a cantar. Along with those decisions, the sultan also recruited government officers whose sole mission was to control and handle sugar distribution, insuring his monopoly on the whole production.²⁶

While Mohamed Ouerfelli questions sultan Barsbay's actions and the part they played in the decline of sugar production in Egypt, he also notes that the main reason the merchants turn towards Cypriot sugar is the far lesser cost of it.

Sugar farming could also lead to one of the elements answering the eventuality of an iqta in Cyprus, the absence of exploitation of the island's mining resources by the Mamluks. Vassiliki Kassianadou gives out an estimate on the mining periods of the Cyprus mineral lodes, from the prehistoric era to late Antiquity. The Troodos Mountains, covering more than one third of the whole island area, included some of the richest deposits known to mankind during Antiquity. Vassiliki Kassianadou also points out that those mineral veins were close to the surface, easily recognizable by the colours of the soil and easy to reach and exploit. While we can find traces and proof that those deposits were still used from time to time for mural paintings and pottery, any wide scale exploitation had been stopped by the 7th century. Starting mass scale mining again was not an option for the Mamluks.²⁷

A permanent Mamluk garrison on the island could also corroborate the existence of an iqta but several chroniclers, including Ibn Tagribirdi or Khalil al Zahiri, note that it was not the case. In the beginning of the conquest of the island, the Mamluks seized Limassol and the

²⁵Ouerfelli, M., *Le sucre*, op.cit., 102-116.

²⁶Ibid., 94-102.

²⁷Kassianidou, V., "Recording Cyprus' mining history through archaeological survey", ed. M. Iacovou, "Archaeological Field Survey in Cyprus: Past History, Future Potential", *BSA Studies 11* (2004), London: 95-104.

surrounding area as detailed by Leontios Machairas. The chronicler depicts in his account of the Chirochitia battle that he was appointed as wine superintendent by the king, a position that put him in contact with all the officers as well as the foot soldiers²⁸. This status gave him an unmatched perspective and testimony on army moves as well as the Mamluks reactions on the battlefield. The chronicler accounts for the troop's movements as early as 1st July 1426. He describes how the sultan sent his troop in June of the year and they landed on the island on the 1st of July, conquering Limassol the very same day.

When Jacques the Second claimed the throne of Cyprus in 1460, the troop's movements are detailed in several chronicles. While none of the authors mention the presence of troops already on the island, the eventuality of inside help on the island leaves little to no doubts.²⁹

The questions arising from those events lead us to think that the island administration wasn't handled like the other Mameluk territories. Albretch Fuess did try to determine if it was an effective protectorate, as the tribute was the only sign of the Mamluks' domination over Cyprus. As we will detail in the next chapter, delegations of ambassadors were sparse and sporadic save for claiming the tribute and the Mamluks seldom got involved in island politics, except during the royal quarrel between Jacques the Second and Charlotte de Lusignan in 1458.³⁰

The conquest did require careful and costly strategies from the sultan (preparing a fleet and joining forces with a flotilla in Beirut) as mentioned by Salih Ibn Yahya.³¹ The fact that once the island was conquered the Mamluks left the royal family in place may ensue from the lack of a regular Mameluk fleet, leading to disinterest in a day to day control of the island.

A permanent Mamluk garrison on the island could also corroborate the existence of an iqta but several chroniclers, including Ibn Tagribirdi or Khalil al Zahiri, note that it was not the case. In the beginning of the conquest of the island, the Mamluks seized Limassol and the surrounding area as detailed by Leontios Machairas. The chronicler depicts in his account of the Chirochitia battle that he was appointed as wine superintendent by the king, a position that puts him in contact with all the officers as well as the foot soldiers³². This status gave him an unmatched perspective and testimony on army moves as well as the Mamluks reactions on the

²⁸ Une histoire du doux pays de Chypre, op.cit., 290-295.

²⁹*The Chronicle of George Boustronios, 1456-1489*, trad.R.M. Dawkins, 2, University Bookroom, University of Melbourne, 1964.

³⁰Fuess, A., "Was Cyprus a Mamluk protectorate? Mamluk policies toward Cyprus between 1426 and 1517." *Journal of Cyprus Studies*, 11.28-29 (2005), 11-29.

³¹Moukarzel, P., "Les expéditions militaires contre Chypre (1424–1426) d'après Šāliḥ b. Yāḥyā: Quelques remarques sur la marine mamelouke.", *Al-Masaq (Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean)*, 19.2 (2007): 177-198.

³² Une histoire du doux pays de Chypre, op.cit., 290-295.

battlefield. The chronicler accounts for the troops movements as early as 1st July 1426. He describes how the sultan sends his troop in June of the year and they landed on the island on the 1st of July, conquering Limassol the very same day.

When Jacques the Second claimed the throne of Cyprus in 1460, the troop's movements are detailed in several chronicles. While none of the authors mention the presence of troops already on the island, the eventuality of inside help on the island leaves little to no doubts.³³

The questions arising from those events lead us to think that the island administration wasn't handled like the other Mameluk territories. AlbretchFuess did try to determine if it was an effective protectorate, as the tribute was the only sign of the Mamluks domination over Cyprus. As we will detail in the next chapter, delegations of ambassadors were sparse and sporadic save for claiming the tribute and the Mamluks seldom got involved in island politics, except during the royal quarrel between Jacques the Second and Charlotte de Lusignan in 1458.³⁴

The conquest did require careful and costly strategies from the sultan (preparing a fleet and joining forces with a flotilla in Beirut) as mentioned by SalihIbnYahya.³⁵ The fact that once the island was conquered the Mamluks left the royal family in place may ensue from the lack of a regular Mameluk fleet, leading to a disinterest in a day to day control of the island.

³³*The Chronicle of George Boustronios, 1456-1489*, trad.R.M. Dawkins, 2, University Bookroom, University of Melbourne, 1964.

³⁴Fuess, A., "Was Cyprus a Mamluk protectorate? Mamluk policies toward Cyprus between 1426 and 1517." *Journal of Cyprus Studies*, 11.28-29 (2005), 11-29.

³⁵Moukarzel, P., "Les expéditions militaires contre Chypre (1424–1426) d'après ŞāliḤ b. YāḤya: Quelques remarques sur la marine mamelouke.", *Al-Masaq (Al-Masaq: Islam and the MedievalMediterranean)*, 19.2 (2007): 177-198.

Chapter 2: The participants

From 1426 to 1517, the Mamluks had set down some organization in order to collect the tribute. At first to be settled by the Lusignan dynasty, its payment was requested afterwards from the Venetians. From the accounts of various Venetian and Italian merchants we can easily determine how the island of Cyprus was perceived through the various Sultanates and the weight it had among the conquered territories. The lack of a definite, established status for the island may be the result of the nonsense of its conquest and a sign of the actual problematic it posed the Mamluks, since they weren't able to find a viable and valid administrative structure to rule Cyprus.

While Janus's reign was laden with hostile actions between the two factions, diplomatic correspondence never got interrupted. Such a tradition of diplomatic letters is firmly set into Mameluk culture with sultans Baybars and Qalawūn signing peace treaties with the Latin States as noted by the clerk Al-Qalqashandī (1355 or 1356 – 1418) in his encyclopaedia, the *Subh al-a'shā*.

To better understand how the conquest altered the issue of Mameluk ambassadors on the island, we must study three moments that acted as pivots between the sultanate and Cyprus. While the mamluks did their best to keep close ties with the Cypriots, the day of the Chirochitia battle, the reign of Jean the Second and the conquest of Cyprus by Jacques de Lusignan the Second heavily influenced the whole balance of diplomatic exchanges.

On the day of the Chirochitia battle, the Mameluk ambassadors sent several letters to negotiate and discuss the terms of the surrender and the following peace treaty as it was usually one under the reigns of Baybars and Qalawūn during the 13th century. P.M Holt describes it in one of his articles: "The actual situation is made very clear by the procedure that followed in negotiations of the truces. The initiative was invariably taken by the Frankish party, whose ambassadors waited on the sultan for the start of negotiations".

Composing a diplomatic letter is, under the Mameluk administration, a task given to the chancellery, the *iwān-al-inshā*, from which Al-Qalqashandī was a member. The scribe gives out instructions to various secretaries but will produce documents from previous reigns which may have been the cause of the knights wrath since there is no mention of Barsbay

whatsoever even if his rug is mentioned. It is possible that the knights deem anyone under the sultan himself as unworthy of their time.

The day of the Chirochitia battle was also the day when the Cypriots executed a Mamluk ambassador, modifying durably relations between the two countries. The old man had brought a letter, written in Arabic, the language usually used for diplomatic exchanges to King Janus and the Mamluks did forgive the offence of his death. Mamluk emissaries can be either envoys (*rasūl*) or emissaries (*qāsid*). The old assassinated Mamluk was a *safīr*, a direct messenger of the sultan and thus entitled to transmit the will of Barsbay himself.

An analysis of the frequency of ambassadors sent to Cyprus between the 15th century and the end of the Mamluk sultanate in 1517, as well as the mindset between the two countries would corroborate the theory of the *iqṭac*.

The Mamluk sultanate did send many diplomats to the Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus. Nicholas Coureas gives a precise list of the ambassadors that visited since the conquest, yet it must be noted that the Lusignan too sent diplomats, as well as Italian merchants or European noblemen dreaming of fame and glory like the Spaniard Pero Tafur who became a main player in Lusignan and Mamluk exchanges. On the Mamluk side, Arabic chronicles depict how Faris al-Turkmani was sent to Cyprus by the Sultan to buy slaves. Pero Tafur, on his part, was sent to the Sultan in 1436 to negotiate a payment for the tribute in fabrics. During the reign of Jean of Lusignan the Second (1432 - 1458), personal relations were established between the king and the Mameluk sultan. Louis de Mas Latrie in his extensive book about Cyprus, describes several embassies whose goals were either managing the aftermath of military events and the preservation of island possessions, or the tribute owed to the Mamluks. Jean the Second commonly appealed to various middlemen to negotiate with the island suzerains, notably in 1448 to request help against the Turks³⁶. The Knights of Rhodes were generally considered as the main interlocutors between the king and the Mameluk sultan. It is interesting to point out that when the Knights Hospitaller mentioned the Cyprus king, they described him as a "vassal" leading to many questions about the island status and the way it was perceived by the other states. The most remarkable moment of the reign of Jean the Second happened in 1456 when the letter he sent to the sultan 'Al-Malek-Ashraf Inal to express his congratulations on accessing the throne and pay his respects fell onto deaf ears.³⁷

³⁶ L. de Mas Latrie, *Histoire de l'île de Chypre sous le règne des princes de la maison de Lusignan*, 3, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1855, 859-876.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 859-862.

Jean II then expressed his pro-mamluk personal politics towards the new island suzerain, seeking compromises with the Knights of Rhodes in order to gather the ransom money needed.

Later on during the recovery of the Cyprus throne by Jacques the Second, the king-to-be was assisted by emir Janibek who travelled with him from Egypt. The Mamluk troops as well as the emir assisting his endeavours are one more clue tending towards establishing a permanent Mameluk garrison on the island.

This event will be widely mentioned and commented on by 15th century authors and chroniclers, both European and Arabic. As the captain and chronicler of the Cyprus' Saline, Georges Boustronios was a privileged witness who despite a somehow laconic and dry character managed to give out a precise and detailed account of the Mameluk presence and moves in Cyprus. He reported that during the deployment of the Mameluk troops accompanying King Jacques the Second, under the command of lieutenants picked by the king himself, 50 men were sent to Aliki and Amassaria to carry artillery, before a Christian knight being sent to Nicosie on the 26th of September of the year 1460 with a Mameluk troop to secure the city. As a last precision, Boustronios indicated that the Mameluk troops were deployed towards Kerynia on the last day of the month.

Georges Boustronios mentioned again the city of Amassaria as being one of the Mameluk outposts during their stay in Cyprus in 1464, under the commandment of Janibek. The town is mentioned twice with Mameluk names but Georges never specifies it being a garrison. This city later became Janibek's and his troops last resting place as Jacques the Second slaughtered him as well as his men when the emir stated that he would conquer Famagusta under his name and not under the Cyprus king's orders. Such a decision from Janibek could be an attempt to create a settlement in Cyprus and be the main cause of his death.

From the claiming of Cyprus by the Venetians in 1489 and through the sultanate conquest in 1517, the tribute has always been requested by the reigning authorities. Yet the interventions to enforce it were seldom effective, like what happened with Jacques the Second from 1460 to 1464. Thus in regard to all those interventions and the lack of intentions to follow, making the conquest more a whim than a thought-out annexation, we may wonder: What were the true form and intent of Mameluk politics in Cyprus?

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