

THE KINGS OF ENGLAND AND MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

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Relations between British and Armenian Kings flourished during the medieval period, when there existed an Armenian kingdom in Cilicia (1080-1375), which held sway over territories extending from the Taurus mountains to the Mediterranean.

It was the period covered by 1189-1393 A.D. that imparted a touch of romantic glamour to the relations between five English and seven Armenian Kings:

ENGLISH KINGS:

- 1) Richard I, "Coeur-de-Lion", 1189- 1199.
- 2) Edward I, 1239-1307.
- 3) Edward II, 1284-1327.
- 4) Edward III, 1312-1377.
- 5) Richard II, 1367-1400.

ARMENIAN KINGS:

- 1) Levon II, 1186-1219.
- 2) Hetoum II (Heyton), 1289-1305.
- 3) Levon IV, 1305-1308.
- 4) Levon V, 1320-1342.
- 5) Guy, 1342-1344.
- 6) Constantine III, 1344-1363.
- 7) Levon VI Lusignan, 1374-1375.

Note: The Armenians had 4 kings bearing the name Constantine.

The years 1189-1199 marked the beginning of Anglo-Armenian relationship Richard I of England, who figured prominently in the Third Crusade, occupied Cyprus in 1191, in which year he entered the Temple of Hymen. Levon II, King of Armenia, attended the wedding ceremony as best man. This same Armenian king lent Richard I a helping hand in the siege of Acre against Salaheddin, Sultan of Egypt, who captured Jerusalem in 1187 A.D.

Armenians may rightly pride themselves on the unstinted assistance they gave to the Crusaders from the very beginning, i.e., from 1096 onward. An eloquent proof of their steadfast loyalty is found in the praise which Pope Gregory lavished on the first bearers of the Christian torch, by inserting the following in his Bulls: ". . . In olden times when the princes and armies of Christendom went to the conquest of the Holy Land, no nation and no people helped them with men, horses, provisions and counsel, with more readiness and zeal than the Armenians . . ." (See this Pope's Bull 'Ecclesia Romana, 1384).

Hetoum II, the Armenian King, (1289- 1305), had his heart and soul in the cause of the Crusaders. This earned him the hatred of Melik Ashraf, Sultan of Egypt, who wrote to him a threatening letter in 1291, the year of the fall of Acre.

In his letter to King Edward I of England, (1239-1307), expressing his jubilation over the fall of Acre, the Armenian king did not fail to mention the threats hurled at him by the Egyptian Sultan. A year later Hetoum II wrote also to Pope Nicholas, acquainting him with the insolent treatment meted out to him by Melik Ashraf. The Pope made it a point to keep the monarchs of England and France posted on what had passed between the Armenian and Egyptian rulers. In 1298 Hetoum's brother sent fresh letters to the Pope as well as to King Edward I of England bearing on the same matter, and received an answer from the latter in December of the same year.

During the reign of Levon IV an Armenian Delegation, consisting of three Armenian nobles, set off to see King Edward I. Unfortunately, however, the English King had already died when the Armenians set foot on British soil. The journey was undertaken at the instance of Hetoum II, who acted as sponsor to Levon IV, after having handed him his scepter.

King Edward II of England (1284-1327), who had succeeded King Edward I, wrote to the Armenian King in March of 1308, intimating his intention of dealing at an opportune moment with the subject raised by the Armenian embassy, whose members were granted both free passage and a gift of fifty pounds in cash. In 1335 King Edward III, (1312-1377), also made a monetary present of forty pounds in silver to a certain George, who was likewise an Armenian envoy. In 1342. Edward wrote to King Levon V of Armenia, (1320-1342), holding out to him hopes of assistance by the Crusaders.

King Guy, (1342-1344), grandson of the deceased King Levon's aunt, Zabella, succeeded Levon V on the throne of Armenia. In 1343 the Armenian king delegated Constant to proceed to England. This emissary delivered into the hands of Edward III a letter from his sovereign together with an epistle bearing the signature of the Pope. King Edward wrote back to the King of Armenia in September of the same year. Four years later Pope Clement VI advised King Edward to bury the hatchet with France and devote his time and energy to the Armenian cause.

On ascending the Armenian throne in succession to King Guy in 1349, King Constantine III made it his first task to send a general to the kings of England and France, requesting them to hasten to his succor. That King Edward III of England was kindly disposed towards the Armenians is seen from the fact that he had generously allowed Armenian monks to travel about England and collect funds on behalf of Armenian churches. This was in 1360. Four years had elapsed when Nerses, the Armenian Bishop of the Convent of St. George situated in the Black Mountains of Cilicia, secured King Edward's permission to make a tour of pilgrimage in England accompanied by one of his monks. His stay in England lasted one year.

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We come to the last phase of Anglo-Armenian state relations during the reigns of King Richard II of England, (1367-1400) and King Levon VI of Armenia, (1374- 1375). The latter was the only Armenian king to have the privilege of seeing England and to enjoy the honour of becoming the guest of an English monarch. Levon VI being the last king of Armenia, the events which occurred during his reign assume a special importance. It is, therefore, advisable that I should dwell on them at some length in so far as they bear on European history in general and affect English history in particular.

King Levon VI, the brother of Guy, was crowned king on the 14th of September 1374. The following year he had to take the field against the Mamelukes of Egypt. He was made a prisoner and taken to Cairo. He suffered the degradation of seven years' captivity. In 1382 he was released thanks to the intervention of Peter IV, king of Arragon, (1336-1387), and John I, King of Castille, (1377-1390).

Restored to freedom, the Armenian king undertook long journeys on the Continent. He visited Italy, Spain, and finally entered France on the 30th of June, 1384, and was received by Charles VI of France, (1380- 1422), with the customary homage due a king. Suffice it to say that the Armenian king was allowed to live in a palace of St. Quen and become the recipient of an annual income of 6000 frcs. in gold. The French King's generosity exceeded the bounds of hospitality. King Levon or Leo, had earned his way into the sympathy and confidence of the French king, so much so that he frequently took part in the state councils held in Paris. The measure of his sagacity can be gauged by the strenuous efforts he put forth to reconcile England and France, which at the time were caught in the throes of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453). He was so keenly bent on inducing the two great nations to accept peace that he offered to mediate. The soundness of the advice he tendered to the French king and his proposals in 1385 are in *Le Laboureur, Histoire De Charles VI, 6th Book, Chapter A.*

But the means of communication between England and France were scant in those days, owing to the tension in Anglo-French relations. The Armenian king took his plunge by boldly asking the English king to see him in person. Richard II readily granted his request, convinced as he was of his *bona fidas*. He caused two permits to be issued, one for the Armenian King, and another for John de Rousp, who was his high "Seneschal" (See T. Rymer, *Foedera*, Vol. 3, Part III, pages 186-187).

The said two permits bear the dates of 24th and 28th October, 1385, respectively. Two passages culled from them, are given below for their historical interest:

"THE KING to all and each, admirals, etc."

"SALUTATIONS.

"BE IT KNOWN to you that when the illustrious Prince Leo, King of the Armenians, reaches our British soil, in order that he may come and return in safety, through this letter we take under our protection the King with his subjects and servants ... of every rank with forty horses and all their armour, all the time he is on our soil, on sea or on land, from the time he comes until he returns freely." The second Permit for the "Seneschal of Armenia" is thus worded:

" I HE KING to all and each, admirals, etc."

"SALUTATIONS.

"BE IT KNOWN to you that JOHN DE ROUSP, the high seneschal of the illustrious Prince Leo, King of Armenia, in company with five people, six horses, four archers, twenty-four bearded subjects with all their equipage . . . etc."

* * *

King Levon VI arrived at Dover at the end of 1385. He was greeted by the Dukes e£ York and Lancaster. After seven days' stay there, he started off for London. Followed by his suite, the English king met him

half way on the road. Rather touching was the scene when the procession came to a halt. The host embraced his guest. ..

(See Chronique du Religieux de Saint- Dewy s. Vol. A, pages 421-423).

The English monarch vied with the French king in being hospitable to his Armenian guest. A palace was put at the latter's disposal for residential purposes. King Richard II and his statesmen met in Council at West-minister. King Leo urged upon them the need for reconciliation. He delivered a wise speech, stressing the fact that Christians in the West were bound in honour to lend a helping hand to the brethren in the East, and that they would be unable to accord such help, unless they sank their differences and marched hand in glove. The Armenian King's speech is published in (*Chronique du Religieux de Saint Denys*, Vide Vol. IV, pages 423-427).

In a graceful response made to King Leo's appeal, Richard II intimated his willingness to cease hostilities immediately, if the terms laid down by his deceased father were adhered to.

On the 22nd of January, 1386, Richard II issued an edict, appointing a royal commission of six. These were to explore the possibilities of peace. Unfortunately for all concerned, the negotiations broke down. A vivid account of the episodes surrounding the desperate efforts at peace made by the last Armenian King is given in R. Holinshed's *Chronicles of England*, 2nd ed., Vol. II, page 446.

Holinshed and Rymer, both English authors, attest that *King Richard II allotted to the Armenian King an annual pension of £1,000, which was paid in two half-yearly installments, i.e. at Easter and at Michaelmas, in addition to many other magnificent presents.*

Let me quote a passage from Rymer in support of my statement.

“FOR THE HONOUR OF GOD AND FOR THE HIGH POSITION OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE AND OUR FELLOW - BROTHER LEON, KING OF THE ARMENIANS WHO IS ADORNED WITH THE ROYAL CROWN.

“Considering that our Brother, with the toleration of the Supreme King, has been robbed of and driven from his kingdom, by the enemies of God, we desire to help him a little as becomes us. Therefore we have granted our brother £1,000 liras in our English money, which he will receive every year from our treasury, half at Easter and half at Michaelmas, until he be able to repossess his kingdom with the help of God.”

Another gracious gesture on the part of the English sovereign was that he allowed King Leo to stay in England until Christmas, providing him with a “Safe Conduct to France with 140 horses.”

In May 1386, King Leo returned to France and acquainted Charles VI with the result of his mission. It was agreed that the English and French rulers should meet in France and thresh out the matter in person. But the projected royal meeting did not materialize. English and French representatives came together. Once more their deliberations ended in stalemate. (See Holinshed and *Chronique de Religieux de Saint Denys*).

Desirous of trying his hand once more, the Armenian king proceeded to England. The second permit issued by order of King Richard II runs as follows “Our beloved fellow-brother Leo, King of the Armenians, to come to England with a retinue of sixty, their horses and equipages, and to remain in England for a year, or to pass on to other countries.”

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The said permit bears the date of 11th December, 1392. King Leo died in Paris on the 29th November 1393, which proves that the Armenian king's sojourn in England must have been a short one. During his last days spent in Paris, King Leo is said to have lost some of the jewels which he had received from the hand of Richard II. This constitutes an indirect proof of the English monarch's munificence to the Armenian king. (See Jorga's "*Philippe de Mesieres*", page 464.)

Leo VI was 51 years old when he died in Paris at the palace of "TOURNELLES". The funeral ceremonies were performed in accordance with the customs governing the burial of Armenian kings, which means that his mourners were all dressed in white. His gentle disposition and piety had won him many friends, which accounts for the great number of attendants at his funeral. (See Juvenal des Ursin's, "*Histoire de Charles VI*".).

In his will, Leo VI appeals to King Richard II (as well as all his kith and kin in Europe) to assist his executors and administrators in the proper and integral execution of the clauses of his last will and testament.

King Leo VI was buried in the Church of Saint Denys. During the welter of the French Revolution in 1789, the costly ornaments of his tomb were filched. His desecrated tomb is still at the Abbey of Saint Denys, which suburb is prized by Parisians as a holy quarter, being situated by the side of the historic "*Mont-de-Mars*". Here it was that Saint Dionysius was massacred with his two companions in 272 A.D., which is responsible for the erection of a beautiful abbey there.

Tradition will have it that the consecration of the church was made by Jesus Christ himself. He had alighted from heaven to bless the church of his three martyrs. One of its corners is believed by pious Frenchmen to have been the spot where Christ stood. This is where the tomb of the Armenian King lies. (See Guilhermy's "*L'Abbaye de Saint Denys et ses Tombeaux*", pages 2 and 58.).

What is now left of the remains of Leo VI is his effigy and the inscriptions. The bones of the Armenian King along with those of other notables were removed to the subterranean cemeteries known as "Les Catacombs de Paris".

The various donations Leo had received from different princes of Europe had made him wealthier than when he sat on the throne of Armenia. To this view subscribe such well-known historians as Walshingham, Eve-sham, and Buchon.

On this tombstone the last Armenian king is inscribed as "Leo V". This error is traceable to the fact that of the six Leos who ruled over Armenia, five only wore the crown. I prefer mathematical exactitude to theoretical distinctions. This is why I class the last Armenian king as Leo VI, whose tombstone carries the following inscription in French:

*“Cy Gist Tres Noble Et Excellent Prince “Lyon De Lusigne, Quint, Roi Latin Du “Royaume D’Armenie,
Qui Rendit L’Ame “A Dieu A Paris Le XXIX Jour De No- vembre, L’An De Grace MCCC XX Et “XIII.*

“Priez Pour Lui.”