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The Captivity and Release of the Armenian King Leo V in Cairo: Diplomatic Gifts and Ransom in Mamluk Diplomacy

This paper is about the captivity and release of the Lusignan king Leo V of Armenia by the Mamluks between the years 1374 and 1382 according to the chronicle of Jean Dardel and Mamluk sources. It documents an important political event in Mamluk history and a diplomatic episode that has not been duly explored.

The Mamluks had conquered their way into history in the age of the Crusades with their victory at Manṣūrah as an elite corps in the army of the Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn (r. 1245–49), who captured the French king Louis IX in 1249 and foiled his Crusade on Egypt. With their victory over the Mongols at ‘Ayn Jālūt in 1260 and the final eviction of the Crusaders from Acre in 1291, they earned their legitimacy as the rulers of Egypt, Syria, and the Hijaz. Confrontations with Christian Europe, however, did not end with the fall of Acre, but continued in the form of piracy and raids on Mamluk Mediterranean ports, keeping the sultanate in a state of permanent alarm and continuous retaliation. This was also a period of busy diplomacy with Latin Europe to negotiate truces and treaties, ransom of prisoners, safe passage for pilgrims, security for the churches in the Holy Land, and, most of all, commercial deals, which always remained of paramount importance in this age of commercial revolution, even in times of warfare.¹ The blessing of the sultanate’s geographical position, which earned the Mamluks the monopoly over the international spice trade and control over the major holy sites of Islam and Christianity, gave them substantial leverage on the international stage.

Among the issues of diplomacy at the time was the exchange of prisoners and hostages captured in warfare and piracy and the negotiation of their ransom. Royal hostages were spectacular cases involving exorbitant ransoms. However, unlike the cases of French king Louis IX following the battle of Manṣūrah in

¹ Aḥmad Darrāj, *Al-Mamālik wa-al-Firanj fī al-qarn al-tāsi‘ al-hijrī al-khāmis ‘ashar al-milādī* (Cairo, 1961); P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (New York, 1995); Subhi Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens im Spätmittelalter (1171–1517)* (Wiesbaden, 1965), 26–41; Yehoshua Frenkel, “Embassies and Ambassadors in Mamluk Cairo,” in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Leiden, 2019), 238–59; Pierre Moukarzel, “The European Embassies at the Court of the Mamluk Sultans in Cairo,” in *ibid.*, 685–724; Nicholas Coureas, “Envoys between Lusignan Cyprus and Mamluk Egypt, 838–78/1435–73: The Accounts of Pero Tafur, George Bous-tronios and Ibn Tagrī Birdī,” in *ibid.*, 725–40.



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1250² and the king of Cyprus Janus of Lusignan following Barsbāy's attack on the island in 1426, both of whom had been captured and released for considerable sums,³ no ransom was mentioned when the last king of Armenia, Leo V, was captured during the battle of Sīs in 776/1374–75 and brought, together with his entourage, to Cairo. This battle, the *coup de grâce* that terminated the history of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, was launched by the governor of Aleppo, Ashaqtamur al-Mardīnī, during the reign of al-Ashraf Sha'bān (r. 1363–77).⁴

It is astonishing how little coverage the fall of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia has received in Mamluk historiography in comparison to previous Cilician campaigns and in view of the significance of this event, which eliminated a Christian kingdom whose alliances with the Mongols and close ties to Latin Europe and its Crusades had been a constant source of trouble to the Mamluks, provoking repeated retaliation campaigns from the reign of al-Zāhir Baybars (r. 1260–77) to that of al-Ashraf Sha'bān.⁵ One would expect this decisive victory against a Lusignan king, achieved only twelve years after the traumatic 1365 sack of Alexandria by Peter I of Lusignan, to have earned more attention. Sultan Barsbāy's attack on Cyprus in 1426 and its subjugation to vassalage, which was considered revenge for Alexandria, was highly celebrated with a detailed description of the humiliated king Janus' parade in the streets of Cairo.

The Mamluk accounts of the conquest and the capture of Leo V with his family and retinue are brief.⁶ Al-Maqrīzī writes that the news was announced to

²Jean de Joinville, *Histoire de St Louis*, ed. Natalis de Wailly (Paris, 1988), 68; Megan Cassidy-Welch, "Imprisonment and Freedom in the Life of Louis IX," in *Imprisonment in the Medieval Religious Imagination, c. 1150–1400*, ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch (London, 2011); Mohamad El Merheb, "Louis IX in Medieval Arabic Sources: The Saint, the King and the Sicilian Connection," *al-Masāq* 28, no. 3 (2016): 282–301.

³Aḥmad Darrāj, *L'Egypte sous le Règne de Barsbāy, 825–841/1422–1438* (Damascus, 1961), 259–60.

⁴Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-zāhirah fī mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Cairo, 1963–71), 11:387–89; idem, *Al-Manhal al-ṣāfi wa-al-mustawfā ba'd al-wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1956–2005), 2:451–54; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd al-faridah fī tarājim al-ʿyān al-mufidah*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Jalīlī (Beirut, 2002), 1:426–27; idem, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. M. Ziyādah and S. ʿAshūr (Cairo, 1970–73), 3:627.

⁵The earlier period of Armenian-Mamluk conflicts has been amply studied and does not need to be documented here. See for example Angus Donald Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks: War and Diplomacy during the Reigns of Het'um II (1289–1307)* (Boston, 2001).

⁶Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:237–38; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-ghumr bi-abnāʾ al-ʿumr* (Beirut, 1986), 1:97–99; idem, *Al-Durar al-kāminah fī ʿyān al-miṣr al-thāminah*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Jād al-Ḥaqq (Cairo, 1966), 1:416; Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm*, 11:130; idem, *Manhal*, 2:451; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, ed. ʿAdnān Darwīsh (Damascus, 1994), 3:450; Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn al-musammā dīwān al-mubtadāʾ fī tārikh al-ʿArab wa-al-Barbar wa-man ʿasharahum min dhawī al-shāʾn al-akbar*, ed. Khalīl Shihādah (Beirut, 2001), 5:525; ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ ibn Khalīl, *Nayl al-amal fī dhayl al-duwal*, ed. ʿUmar ʿA. Tadmurī (Beirut, 2002), 1:2:89; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-



the sultan by the governor of Damascus, the amir Baydamur,⁷ and that the celebrations there lasted three days. The sultan then appointed the amir Ya‘qūb Shāh⁸ as governor of Sīs. Ibn Ḥajar is the only author to add the information that credits a certain master craftsman (*mu‘allim*) Khalīl al-Ghassānī for contributing to the victory with his expertise in the production of trebuchets. Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah, Ibn Khaldūn, and al-Sakhāwī mention that the king and his family were granted an allowance during his stay in Egypt, which lasted eight years. Al-Qalqashandī, who refers briefly to the event, wrongly names the conquering amir Qushtumur al-Manṣūrī.⁹ ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ comments that Sīs was no longer part of *dār al-ḥarb* but belonged now to *dār al-islām* as a kingdom in its own right (*mamlakah bi-dhātihā, mamlakah mustaqillah bi-nafsihā*). All authors agree that the victory took place following two months of siege.

Although Leo V was of the Lusignan stock of Cyprus and related to Peter I (who, remember, had led the Alexandrian Crusade), the Mamluks may not at first have recognized the Cyprus and Lusignan connection that might have given their victory in Cilicia a greater significance as revenge. The historians describe the king as *takfūr*, which is the term used for Armenian kings.

After Ayas had been raided in 1322 and eventually taken by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in 1335, Cilicia no longer presented a significant threat to the Mamluk sultanate.¹⁰ The alliance between the Hethumid king Leo IV (d. 1341) and the kingdom of Cyprus ruled by the Frankish Lusignan dynasty could not prevent Mamluk attacks and Turcoman advance. In 1359–60, during the reign al-Nāṣir Ḥasan, the governor of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dīn Baydamur al-Khawārizmī,¹¹ assaulted Sīs, Adana, Tarsus, and other strongholds and ordered coins minted and the

Sakhāwī, *Wajīz al-kalām fī dhayl ‘alā duwal al-Islām*, ed. Bashshār al-‘Awaḍ Ma‘rūf et al. (Damascus, 2005), 1:206; Ibn Iyās, *Badā‘i‘ al-zuhūr fī waqā‘i‘ al-duhūr*, ed. M. Muṣṭafá (Wiesbaden, 1961–75), 1:2:139; Aḥmad al-Bayrūtī, untitled manuscript, Ashmolean Library, MS Marshall Or 36, dated Ramaḍān 788/1386, fols. 87r–88v, cites poems celebrating the event. I thank Jo van Steenbergen for drawing my attention to the manuscripts cited here.

⁷This was Baydamur al-Khawārizmī, who had assaulted Sīs earlier on. See note 11, below.

⁸Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 12:147.

⁹Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shá fī ṣinā‘at al-inshā‘* (Cairo, 1914–28), 4:179; 8:32–33. I thank Takao Ito for drawing my attention to this.

¹⁰Armenian-Mongol relations are documented in studies on Armenian and Mongol history and studies on the Crusades, all of which necessarily deal with the Mamluk connection. See also Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 2004); Angus Donald Stewart, “The Assassination of King Het‘um II: The Conversion of the Ilkhans and the Armenians,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, no. 1 (2005); Dashdondog Bayarsaikhan, *The Mongols and the Armenians (1220–1335)*, (Leiden, 2011).

¹¹Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 3:498–99. Claude Mutafian calls Baydamur “Beg Timour” (*Le Royaume Arménien de Cilicie XIIe–XIVe siècle* [Paris, 1998], 87).



khutbah performed in the name of the sultan who received the cities' keys.¹² Armenia's access to the sea and to Cyprus was blocked, her only maritime outlet being the port of Kyrikos, which allied itself to Cyprus and eventually came under Genoese control with the regency of Peter I's widow, Queen Eleanor.¹³

When Leo V ascended the throne of Armenia in 1374, his kingdom was only a portion of what it had been, concentrated around the capital, Sīs, whose treasury (according to his biographer, Dardel) was empty. Mamluk forces in alliance with the expanding Turcoman power in the region had taken possession of major Cilician strongholds.¹⁴

The last two decades of Armenian history, described as a period of agony,¹⁵ are less documented and only briefly mentioned in studies on Armenian history.¹⁶ The only primary source regarding the end of the Cilician kingdom is Leo V's biography as narrated by the French Franciscan friar Jean Dardel.¹⁷ Little is known about Dardel except what he himself revealed in his *Chronique d'Arménie*. He was born in Estampes in France at an unknown date and became a Franciscan friar toward the mid-fourteenth century.¹⁸ Dardel's first encounter with the Armenian king took place during his visit to Cairo in 1377, on the occasion of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Mount Sinai. In this meeting, Leo offered to employ him as his secretary and confessor and eventually entrusted him with a mission to campaign in European courts for his release, which Dardel eventually achieved.¹⁹ Dardel remained in Cairo until 1379. On his return to Europe, Leo

¹²Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:50; Ibn Taghribirdī mentions this event in his biographical entry on Baydamur but not in his chronicle.

¹³Mutafian, *Royaume*, 88.

¹⁴See Malika Dekkiche, "Crossing the Line: Mamluk Response to Qaramanid Threat in the Fifteenth Century according to MS ar. (Bnf, Paris)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 80, no. 2 (2017): 253–81.

¹⁵Mutafian, *Royaume*, 73, 89.

¹⁶*Ibid.*; Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom*, 185–93; Jacob Ghazarian, *The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia during the Crusades: The Integration of Cilician Armenians with the Latins 1080–1393* (Oxford, 2000), 160–63, does not refer to Dardel or to the events in Cairo. See also T. S. R. Boase, "The History of the Kingdom," in *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, ed. T. S. R. Boase (Edinburgh, 1978).

¹⁷Jean Dardel, *Chronique d'Arménie*, ed. Charles Schefer and Louis de Mas Latrie, *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Documents Arméniens* vol. 2 (Paris, 1906), 1–109. See <https://archive.org/details/RecueilDesHistoriensDesCroisadesDocumentsArmeniensTomeSecond/page/n269/mode/2up> for a digitized copy of the work. For the editors' introduction to Dardel and his *Chronique*, see pages v–xxii.

¹⁸Cristian Bratu, "Dardel, Jean," in *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_emc_SIM_00857; G. Golubovich, "Jean Dardel," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04635a.htm>.

¹⁹Dardel, *Chronique*, Chapter 116, 89–90.



commissioned him to write the history of Armenia, including his own reign, obviously providing him with much of the documentation. In 1383, Pope Clement VII (of Avignon), in acknowledgement of his achievements in the service of the Armenian king, appointed Dardel Bishop of Tortiboli in the Kingdom of Naples.

Dardel's *Chronique d'Arménie*, which was completed in 1393, did not receive attention until the discovery of the manuscript in the nineteenth century in the Library of Dôle in France. It was published in 1906 with annotations by the historians Louis de Mas-Latrie and Charles Schefer. Whereas Mutafian does not regard Dardel's chronicle as fully reliable on the grounds of its "hagiographic" character²⁰ and Boase describes him as "prejudiced,"²¹ the annotations to the publication made by Mas Latrie and Schefer—the latter a scholar in Islamic studies—largely confirm Dardel's credibility regarding contemporary events and the Mamluk scene.

The *Chronique*, which begins with the conversion of Great Armenia to Christianity, reaches the events related to Leo V's ascendancy to the throne in Chapter 51 and ends with Chapter 144, where his journey from Castile to Paris ends.²² The account of Leo V's reign and the events that led to the fall of Cilicia and his captivity in Cairo is based entirely on Dardel's rendering.

Leo V was the son of John of Poitiers-Lusignan (d. 1343), constable and regent of Armenia under King Leo IV (1320–41). He was the son of Amalric, prince of Tyre, and Isabella of Armenia, and brother of Guy of Lusignan, who became king of Armenia under the name Constantine II for a short period (1342–44) that ended with his assassination.²³ His mother, Soldane (d. after 1343), was John's concubine who Dardel identifies only as the daughter of an unnamed Georgian king. When Leo IV's Hethumid successor Constantine III (1344–62) died without an heir, Pope Urban V suggested his relative Peter I of Lusignan, the king of Cyprus, who is reported to have seriously contemplated it. This was, however, rejected by members of the Armenian ruling establishment, who preferred rather to enthrone the Hethumid Constantine IV (who eventually allied himself with Peter I of Cyprus and offered him the port and fortress of Kyrikos). Following Peter's assassination in 1369, Constantine IV sought an arrangement with the

²⁰Mutafian, *Royaume*, 89.

²¹Boase, "History of the Kingdom," 1–33, and see bibliographical notes, *idem*, *Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, 188.

²²Dardel, *Chronique*, 39–109.

²³William Henry Rüdts-Collenberg, *The Rupenides, Hethumides and Lusignans: The Structure of the Armeno-Cilician Dynasties* (Paris, 1963), 74–76; Christopher MacEvitt, "The King, the Bishop, and the Dog who Killed Him: Canine Cultural Encounters and Medieval Armenian Identity," in *Old Worlds, New Worlds: European Cultural Encounters, c. 1100–c. 1750*, ed. Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelman, and Kim M. Phillips (Turnhout, 2009), 46–48.



Mamluks, but this was rejected by the pro-Latin Cilician factions and led to his assassination in 1373.

Queen Mary/Mariam of Kyrikos, Constantine IV's widow and regent, turned to Pope Gregory XI for support against the Muslim threat. As no reaction followed, she asked the new king of Cyprus, Peter II, to send Leo of Lusignan to ascend the throne of Cilicia. Leo, his mother, and his brother Bohemond had settled in Cyprus after escaping imprisonment by Constantine IV. Leo grew up in Famagusta, which at that time was controlled by the Genoese.²⁴ He probably did not speak Armenian. According to Dardel, his appointment found no great support in Cyprus, where he was suspected of being involved in the murder of Peter I. He faced the opposition of Peter's widow and the mother of Peter II, Eleanor the Aragonese queen and regent of Cyprus, as well as that of her Genoese allies, who controlled the island and barred him from landing in Kyrikos. Moreover, Leo was forced to renounce any claim to the fiefdom of his wealthy wife, Marguerite of Soisson, and to transfer it to Eleanor.

Mutafian agrees that Leo indeed did not enjoy the full support of his subjects, who were divided between "Latinophiles" and nationalist Hethumids. The former had the last word that led to Leo's invitation to the throne.

Immediately after ascending the throne, Leo made plans to regain Tarsus from the Mamluks.²⁵ This was opposed by members of the native aristocracy, who preferred to avoid further confrontation with the Mamluks. Moreover, Leo's staunch devotion to the Church of Rome seems to have contributed to the animosity he encountered among the Armenian population and parts of the aristocracy, as emphasized by the Catholic cleric Dardel in his narration. Among Leo's opponents was the catholicos Boghos I, who objected to Leo's coronation in the Roman rite (unlike his Latin predecessors, who had been enthroned according to Armenian tradition).²⁶ However, Leo and Marguerite were anointed twice: in a Roman ceremony and an Armenian ceremony.

Leo's scheme to reconquer Tarsus was soon betrayed to the Mamluks and their Turcoman allies, who had the support of some Armenian aristocrats that had found refuge in Cairo. Among these was Ashot son of Ossin d'Orgruy, brother-in-law of the last Armenian king, Constantine IV and a pretender to the throne, who at Leo's arrival in Sīs left for the Mamluk sultanate, where he converted to Islam while maintaining connections with the old regime in Armenia.²⁷

Unlike the brief references to the events in Mamluk sources, which do not mention the Turcoman contribution to the battle of Sīs, Dardel's detailed de-

²⁴Mutafian, *Royaume*, 87–89; Boase, "History of the Kingdom."

²⁵Dardel, *Chronique*, 54.

²⁶Ibid., 65; Mutafian, *Royaume*, 89–90.

²⁷Dardel, *Chronique*, 69.



scription reveals a substantial Turcoman contribution mainly in the early phase of the siege.²⁸ He names two Turcoman leaders, Abū Bakr (Boudbaquir) and Dāwūd Pāshā (Daoubdash), who, following direct orders from Sultan Sha‘bān, had already—before the arrival of Ashaqtamur (Mellech l’amirail du Halep)—begun the siege of Sīs and captured the lower city, forcing the king and the population to withdraw into the castle in the upper city. Ashaqtamur, encouraged by what Dardel describes as the Armenian “traitors,” advanced to assist the Turcomans. Apart from Dardel’s report, the extent of Qaramanid involvement in the Mamluk conquest of Sīs is not known.

Probably echoing his king’s frustration, Dardel talks at length of the Armenian intrigues surrounding the events, emphasizing the consistent undermining of the king’s initiatives by his subjects who supported a Mamluk-Turcoman victory. Following two months of siege of the fort of Sīs, Leo escaped to the stronghold of Gaban, which was besieged for another nine months before he surrendered, severely injured during the battle but consistently rejecting the Mamluk offer to convert to Islam in exchange for maintaining his throne as a vassal.

Upon his surrender to the governor of Aleppo, Ashaqtamur, the king, with his family and a retinue that included the old queen and widow of the former king, were treated decently and given a solemn reception with robes of honor. Ashaqtamur offered the king a stately tent and sent him two physicians to treat his wounds. This recalls the case of the French King Louis IX, who likewise received medical treatment after his capture at Manşūrah.

Before it was even requested, the Armenian king handed over his treasury to Ashaqtamur, who asked him to postpone the process and let it instead take place publicly to avoid later accusations of embezzlement.²⁹ It is interesting to note that accusations of embezzlement in connection with the Cilician booty were indeed later raised against Ashaqtamur by his Mamluk peers. Ibn al-Furāt reports that in the month of Sha‘bān 776/1375 Ashaqtamur was summoned to Cairo regarding the booty of Sīs, following reports from Damascus that had aroused Sultan Sha‘bān’s suspicion. Ashaqtamur arrived in Cairo loaded with riches but could not meet in person with the sultan, who was in Alexandria at that time.³⁰ Al-Maqrīzī mentions this visit but does not refer to the suspicions against the amir.³¹ Ibn Taghrībirdī praises Ashaqtamur throughout his biographical entry, briefly noting his greed when it came to money. Ashaqtamur’s biographical entries, which are rather brief, describe his career after the vic-

²⁸It is not possible to determine whether these were Ramazanoglus or Qaramanids.

²⁹Dardel, *Chronique*, 84.

³⁰Ibn al-Furāt, “Al-Muntaqá min tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt, Chester Beatty MS Or 4125, fol. 22v.

³¹Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:354.



tory of Sīs as unsteady and interrupted by exile and prison, for which no reasons are indicated. He was appointed governor of Aleppo three times as well as other governor posts.³²

On Ashaqtamur's return to Aleppo with his Armenian captives, he ordered a parade of the dismounted king and his male retinue in the square at the foot of the citadel; the ladies did not have to dismount.³³ This parade was less humiliating than the one Janus of Lusignan experienced in Cairo in 1427, when he rode fettered on a mule through the city before prostrating and kissing the floor in front of the sultan at the citadel, at which point he is reported to have collapsed.³⁴

Once the ceremony in Aleppo was over, Leo and his retinue received decent lodging and maintenance. Ashaqtamur even made a cordial gesture towards the king by releasing in his honor Armenian individuals who had been in his captivity for some time.

Dardel writes that the Armenian king arrived in Cairo on 9 July 1375, and was given comfortable housing. No celebration or parade of the captive in Cairo is mentioned. On 13 July he was introduced to Sultan Shaḥbān during a customary public audience, where he was asked to take off his headcover and bow three times before the sultan. With thanks, Leo rejected the sultan's offer to convert to Islam in exchange for a title described by Dardel as "*grand seigneur*." The sultan replied that, as a result of this refusal, Leo would not be allowed to leave the sultan's territory but would be free to dwell wherever he chose in Cairo.³⁵ From there the matter was taken by the amir and *dawādār* Sayf al-Dīn Ṭashtamur al-ʿAlāʾī (d. 1389) (Descamour Deudar)³⁶ who consulted the heads of the Armenian community in Cairo about their willingness to receive the king in their community, which they gladly did. The sultan granted the king a daily allowance of 60 dirhams and a residence of his choice.³⁷ As a comparison, the highest monthly salary paid to a senior teacher (*shaykh*) at the *khānqāh*-madrasah of Sultan Barqūq, founded in 788/1386, amounted to 300 dirhams.³⁸ The quarter where the king settled, called al-Kūm, was a former rubbish hill in the neighborhood of

³²Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 2:451–54.

³³Dardel, *Chronique*, 84–85.

³⁴Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 4:724–25.

³⁵Dardel, *Chronique*, 86.

³⁶Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 6:395–96.

³⁷Dardel, *Chronique*, 86–87.

³⁸Leonor Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamluk Egypt: The Khanqah* (Berlin, 1988), 74.



the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn inhabited by Frankish captives.³⁹ The Armenian colony mentioned here consisted of captives taken during the series of Mamluk campaigns in Cilicia since the mid-thirteenth century and their descendants. There was already a much older Armenian community in Cairo whose history goes back to the Fatimid period.⁴⁰ Ṭashtamur then asked the other Armenian captives who were with Leo about their wishes. The old queen requested to be sent to Jerusalem. The catholicos was allowed to return to Sīs with some followers. Others preferred to stay in Cairo, and some of them converted to Islam and, accordingly, enjoyed privileges. Dardel blames the catholicos for his betrayal of the king and, moreover, for praying in the name of the sultan in Sīs. The catholicos had probably had no choice in this matter, since these were the rules regarding the *khuṭbah* as symbol of sovereignty.

At some unspecified point between his capture in 1375 and Sultan Shaḥbān's assassination in 1377, Leo sent a message to his cousin Peter II of Lusignan, the king of Cyprus (r. 1359–82), asking him for help securing his release. Peter responded by sending two clerics with a message to that effect to al-Ashraf Shaḥbān. The messengers were halted in Damascus and prevented from reaching the sultan “because they were poor, badly dressed, and empty-handed without any gift,”⁴¹ but the letter they carried was forwarded to the sultan, who sent a reply to Cyprus saying that the Armenian king had no wish to leave Cairo. Dardel comments that, after realizing Leo's exalted lineage in European royalty, Shaḥbān feared his release might incite his European peers to help him return to his throne. To avoid such a threat, the sultan pressured the captive to write a statement saying he had no intention or desire to return to Europe.

Envoys sent by the Byzantine emperor, the Pope, the kings of France and Naples, and members of the Lusignan dynasty all failed to achieve any progress in the case. Dardel attributes the failures to the fact that they came without diplomatic gifts. Only the Byzantine envoy brought a gift, but it was not much appreciated. Some envoys did not even appear in proper attire and were ridiculed by the Egyptians for their shabby appearance. He further comments that the “Sarrazins” were rapacious, greedy, and conceited and would not be motivated to any move without seeing a profit for themselves.⁴²

³⁹Julien Loiseau, “Frankish Captives in Mamluk Cairo,” *Al-Masāq* 23, no. 1 (2011): 49–50; Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Furāt*, ed. Quṣṭanṭīn Ruzayq (Beirut, 1936), 9:110.

⁴⁰See Seta B. Dadoyan, *The Fatimid Armenians: Cultural and Political Interaction in the Near East* (New York, 1997).

⁴¹Dardel, *Chronique*, 88–89.

⁴²Dardel, *Chronique*, 92–93.



Sultan Sha‘bān was assassinated and succeeded by his sons al-Manṣūr ‘Alī (r. 1377–81) and al-Ṣāliḥ Ḥajjī (r. 1381–82), who ruled under the regency of the head of the army, the *atābak* Barqūq, who soon ascended the throne himself in 1382 as al-Ẓāhir Barqūq (r. 1382–89 and 1390–99).

Dardel reports that the amir Sayf al-Dīn Bahādur al-Manjakī (Saffedin Bahadour), who was of Cypriot origin (as also confirmed by Ibn Taghrībirdī citing al-‘Aynī, according to whom he was either Greek or Frankish⁴³), sympathized with the Armenian king and tried to help him by persuading the amir Aynabak al-Badrī (Ennebek)⁴⁴ to support his release. Before this could happen, however, Aynabak fell into disgrace and was imprisoned.

An attempt by the king of Aragon to secure Leo’s release was unsuccessful. The envoy François Saclose arrived in Cairo in 1378 with a letter requesting the release of some merchandise previously confiscated from Aragonese merchants by Mamluk authorities. He also brought with him another request regarding Leo’s release, submitted orally to the young sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Ḥajjī and the amir Barqūq (Barcouc). The amir fulfilled the envoy’s first request but rejected the second one with the argument that it was merely oral and not accompanied by a gift and was, therefore, neither authenticated nor trustworthy.⁴⁵

At this point Leo assigned to Dardel the mission to campaign for his release in Europe. Dardel departed for Spain in September 1379 and returned in September 1382. While describing his mission in detail, he was keen to make sure, probably on Leo’s own recommendation, that requests for his release should be accompanied by adequate gifts to the sultan. King Peter of Aragon, father-in-law of king of Cyprus Peter I of Lusignan, was ready to send a formal and explicit letter requesting the release⁴⁶ but did not contribute a gift, whereas King Juan I of Castile willingly donated gems, silver, gold vessels, fine textiles, and four falcons as gifts to the sultan in addition to taking charge of Dardel’s travel and maintenance expenses. Dardel reports that the letter carried by the envoys, signed 10 September 1380, was accompanied by a gift of jewels.⁴⁷ This is confirmed by the Spanish chronicler Pedro Ayala (1332–1407), who mentions that rubies of the highest quality, falcons, textiles, and artifacts of silver and gold were listed in the very letter sent by Juan I to the sultan, the text of which he includes in

⁴³ Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Manhal*, 3:435–36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 222–23.

⁴⁵ Dardel, *Chronique*, 94.

⁴⁶ Próspero de Bofarull y Mascaró, *Procesos de las Antiguas Cortes y Parlamentio de Catalunya, Aragon y Valencia, Coleccio de Documentos Inéditos del Archivo General de la Corona de Aragon*, vol. 6 (Barcelona, 1850), CXVII, 371, https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_5ezTAAAAMAAJ/page/n373/mode/2up.

⁴⁷ Dardel, *Chronique*, 97–101.



his chronicle.⁴⁸ Ayala's chronicle also includes the text of the reply sent by the sultan's deputy—who must be Barqūq—to the Castilian king, submitted by the envoys who eventually accompanied the Armenian king to Castile.

The embassy was received by the new, young sultan al-Ṣāliḥ ʿAlī in the presence of the regent, amir Barqūq. The latter blamed the Aragonese for not including a gift of their own to accompany their letter, adding a remark in the sense of “not that the sultan was in need of their gems and textiles, but this was a matter of procedure; even an apple would be appreciated as a token of friendship.” Barqūq further remarked that the Aragonese knew all too well what was to be done when their own commercial interests were at stake, adding that their king would pay a thousand dirhams to purchase a slave, but when it came to the release of a king, he seemed less concerned.⁴⁹

The envoys were given another appointment to meet the sultan after his officials had examined the gems sent by the king of Castile, which were eventually highly appreciated.⁵⁰ On Leo's advice, the gifts were to be divided between Barqūq and the sultan.⁵¹ Soon afterward, on 30 September 1382, Barqūq, in the presence of the sultan, issued the official order to release the king and bestowed robes of honor on him and his retinue.

The Armenian king manumitted his slaves and set out the next day. Barqūq escorted him to the port of Būlāq to board the sultan's own vessel to Alexandria. To add suspense to this story, Dardel reports that some Mamluks seem to have had second thoughts about the release, fearing that once he was back in Europe among his peers the Armenian king could make use of his connections to reclaim his kingdom. They sent their men to Alexandria after him but they arrived after he was already at sea.⁵²

Mamluk chronicles do not mention anything about Leo's fate between his arrival in Cairo in 1375 and 1382, when a very brief notice reports his release following a request by an embassy from Castile.⁵³ The German pilgrim Johann von Bodman, who met Leo in 1381, reported merely that the king showed him, in a church at Fuṣṭāṭ, an icon of the Virgin Mary that performed miracles.⁵⁴

⁴⁸Pedro López de Ayala, *Crónicas de los Reyes de Castilla, Don Pedro, Don Enrique II, Don Juan I, Don Enrique III* (Madrid, 1770), 135–36, 168–73.

⁴⁹Dardel, *Chronique*, 101.

⁵⁰Ibid., 102. López de Ayala gives the text of the letters exchanged between Juan I and the Mamluk court in 1770: *Crónicas*, 135–36, 168–73.

⁵¹Dardel, *Chronique*, 94.

⁵²Ibid., 102–3.

⁵³Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 3:471, 472; Ibn Ḥajar, *Imbāʿ*, 2:90.

⁵⁴Alfons Semler, ed., *Die Pilgerreise des Johann von Bodman: Nach der Karlsruher Handschrift veröffentlicht* (n.p., n.d., ca. 1915), 132–33, <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/>



Before his release, Leo's wife and daughter died in Cairo. The Italian pilgrim Frescobaldi, who visited the city in 1384 after the king's departure, saw in the church of "St. Martin Bishop of Alexandria," located between the Coptic quarter at Fustāṭ and al-Qāhirah, the sepulchre of the queen of Armenia wrapped in silk.⁵⁵ Otherwise, the eight-year residence of the Armenian king and his family does not seem to have been much noticed in the Egyptian capital.

After sailing from Alexandria, Leo began his odyssey in Europe. He was refused entry to Cyprus and landed at Rhodes. From there he went to Venice, then to Avignon to meet the pope, then to Barcelona to meet Peter IV of Aragon, and finally to Madrid to the court of Juan I of Castile, who honored him with the title of Lord (Señor) of Madrid and granted him the towns Villareal and Andujar as well as a yearly allowance. Leo eventually made the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela and finally settled in Paris, where he led a luxurious life at the château de Saint-Ouen, a gift to him from Charles VI, the king of France. Leo's attempts to achieve reconciliation between England and France, in the hope that it might help resuscitate a Crusade and bring back his kingdom, failed.

Upon Leo V's death in 1393, the title "king of Armenia" went to his cousin James I, king of Cyprus (r. 1382–98). When his great-granddaughter Queen Charlotte of Cyprus (r. 1458–64) had to fight for her throne against her illegitimate brother James, she asked the Mamluks, who since Barsbāy's conquest of the island in 1426 were suzerains of Cyprus, to interfere in the quarrel. After some reluctance, Sultan Īnāl (r. 1453–61) decided in favor of James and sent troops to support his claim. Charlotte's title eventually went to the house of Savoy, who held it until 1946 as kings of Armenia, Cyprus, and Jerusalem!⁵⁶

In the same year as Leo's release, al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Ḥajar report the arrival in Cairo of an Armenian messenger from the governorate of Sīs with the task of selecting a person among the Armenian community of captives settled in the quarter of al-Kūm⁵⁷ in Cairo to be appointed as successor to their *ḥākim* who had recently died. In Mamluk terminology the term *ḥākim* is mostly used for "judge," but in this context it would rather refer to a leader of the community. The choice fell on a man who owned a tavern in the quarter. This request suggests that the Armenians of Sīs had an autonomous administration, like the other religious minorities under Mamluk rule.

mittgnm/article/download/28801/22490/.

⁵⁵ *Viaggio di Lionardo di Niccolò Frescobaldi Fiorentino in Egitto e in Terra Santa*, (Rome, 1818), 103, https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_GIfDMM-Ek-gC/page/n124/mode/1up.

⁵⁶ Mutafian, *Royaume*, 90–91.

⁵⁷ In this quarter, located near the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, between Fustāṭ and al-Qāhirah, there was already a community of Christian captives. Ibn al-Furāt, *Tārīkh*, 9:1:9.



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DIPLOMACY AND GIFTS

Dardel's account is remarkable for the information it provides about Mamluk diplomatic practice. On several occasions he emphasizes the significance of gifts in negotiations with the Mamluks. He interprets the failure of earlier envoys to achieve the release of the Armenian king as resulting from their disregard of decorum—especially regarding gifts, which were expected at the Mamluk court. Only when it was properly handled according to protocol, with the presentation of formal and explicit letters of solicitation accompanied by satisfactory gifts, did the mission succeed.

Dardel's description of Mamluk expectations regarding diplomatic gifts and formalities, explicitly and bluntly expressed, is plausible and is confirmed on other occasions and in several other accounts.⁵⁸ The diary of the Florentine envoy Felice Brancacci at the court of Barsbāy is full of complaints about the demands for payments, gifts, and gratuities he had to deal with during his mission.⁵⁹ Peter Martyr, the envoy sent in 1501–2 by Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile to the court of Sultan al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–6), likewise had to face the outrage of the sultan's officials when he appeared empty-handed and, moreover, without a retinue, as would be expected. His response was that in his country it was considered an offense to try to give a present to a king.⁶⁰ Ibn Iyās reports that an envoy from Ethiopia was blasted by al-Ghawrī's officials for the shabbiness of the gifts he presented in comparison to previous Ethiopian gifts.⁶¹ Mamluk outrage and reprimands may have been bolder and more outspoken when dealing with Christian powers. There was a pattern in diplomatic gift-giving that discriminated between gifts for Muslims or Christians.⁶² This may explain why the chroniclers were less interested in describing the gifts their sultans gave than those they received. The latter were usually displayed at the court to advertise the sultan's status in the world. The spectacular gifts sent by Sultan Qāytbāy to Lorenzo de Medici in 1487, whose display is described in Italian sources as having rocked Florence, and which were described and commemorated in a famous painting by Vasari in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence,

⁵⁸Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the Medieval Islamic World* (London, 2016), 27.

⁵⁹Mahnaz Yousefzadeh, *Florence's Embassy to the Sultan of Egypt: An English Translation of Felice Brancacci's Diary* (New York, 2018).

⁶⁰Pedro Martír de Anglería, *Una Embajada de los Reyes Católicos a Egipto según la Legatio Babylonica' y el 'Opus Epistolarum' de Pedro Martír*, ed. and trans. Luis García y García (Valladolid, 1947), 82; Petrus Martyr Anglerius, *Legatio Babylonica: Die Gesandtschaft nach Babylonien*, ed. and trans. Hans Heinrich Todt (Wiesbaden, 2015), 213.

⁶¹Ibn Iyās, *Badā'ī*, 4:12

⁶²Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*, 24, 50, 106, 134, 140.



did not receive any mention in Mamluk sources.⁶³ Lavish gifts sent to Christian rulers or other hostile powers might have been kept quiet in order not to be interpreted as signs of deference towards an enemy, as happened when al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had to justify to a disapproving official the expensive gifts he had sent to his former enemy the Ilkhanid Abū Saʿīd.⁶⁴

The lines between tribute, ransom, and gift in Mamluk diplomacy are often blurred.⁶⁵ In Mamluk terminology the term *hadiyah* was used for gift as well as for tribute; in practice, gifts had an obligatory function which, when coming from an inferior or subordinate partner, were indeed equivalent to tribute. Whereas Barqūq is reported by Dardel to have told the Castilian envoys that even an apple would be appreciated as a symbol of friendship, Mamluk officials' inspection and evaluation of the Castilian gifts prior to the release of the captive rather suggests that these were viewed as a kind of payment for Leo's release.

CONCLUSION

Compiled under Leo V's patronage and influence while at the same time being based on his experience as an eyewitness who lived in Cairo for two years and was an active participant in the events surrounding his patron's release, Dardel's account of the events is an interesting document for Mamluk history. His dates conform to those indicated in the Mamluk chronicles, the names of people involved are recognizable, and their roles are confirmed by Mamluk sources. Dardel was well informed about the political situation and intrigues going on at the Mamluk court during the years of Leo's captivity, as he refers to events confirmed by Mamluk sources, such as the role of the amir Aynabak al-Badrī in the conspiracy against the sultan. His mention of the Cypriot origin of the amir al-Sayfī Bahādūr is corroborated by Mamluk authors. He also accurately mentions that the sultan held his biweekly public audiences on Mondays and Thursdays. The texts he provides of official letters and messages addressed to Leo V by Ashaqtamur correspond fully with the style of the Mamluk chancery.⁶⁶

It is difficult to say why Leo V was not paraded in Cairo like Janus would later be or to determine why this Mamluk triumph was not loudly celebrated in the sources. The answer to the former question may be that his having been paraded in Aleppo was considered sufficient humiliation. The latter question is more complicated. The adolescent Shaʿbān's early reign was shaken by the Al-

⁶³ Christiane Joost-Gaugier, "Lorenzo the Magnificent and the Giraffe as a Symbol of Power," *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 16 (1987): 91–99.

⁶⁴ Al-Maqrīzī, *Sulūk*, 2:536–37.

⁶⁵ On gifts in Mamluk diplomatic practice, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy*.

⁶⁶ Dardel, *Chronique*, Chapter 117, 90–91.



alexandrian Crusade, which prompted the initiative of the mighty amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī to build a formidable new fleet of 100 warships—publicly displayed with great pomp—to target Cyprus for revenge. The fleet, however, never left the Nile; it was used instead against fellow Mamluks allied with the sultan in a struggle that ended with the amir’s murder in 1366.⁶⁷ The declared revenge for Alexandria was Barsbāy’s raid on Cyprus in 1426. The reason that no connection was made between Alexandria and Sīs might be that at the time of Leo’s capture the Mamluks were not aware of his Lusignan lineage and his connections with Cyprus, which would also explain why there was no mention of a ransom. Most importantly, unlike Louis IX and Janus, the captive had no kingdom to ransom him and to return to, nor, it seems, an ally interested in his release. The explanation for this may be the complex European-Cypriot-Armenian relations of that time. Dardel blames the failure of earlier attempts to release the king on inadequate procedures on the European side, clumsiness in handling the matter, and Shaḅbān’s fear that the king’s ties with European courts might lead to attempts to recover his lost kingdom. This view deserves consideration.

In the history of the Mamluk sultanate and its struggle against Crusaders, Dardel’s account sheds light on a major event—the final elimination of a Christian kingdom—while also revealing aspects of Mamluk diplomatic practices with Latin Europe.

⁶⁷Jo Van Steenberg, “On the Brink of a New Era: Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī and the Yalbughāwīyah,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 15 (2011): 117–19.

