

MEDIEVAL WOMEN OF CYPRUS

A COMPANION GUIDE

SEMRA BAYHANLI | AHMET KEMAL HILMI | ADEM HILMI
LONDON 2026



“

THIS GUIDE IS DEDICATED TO THE WOMEN OF CYPRUS WHO LEFT THEIR INDELIBLE MARK ON THE ISLAND AND THE WIDER HISTORY OF EUROPE. THESE REMARKABLE INDIVIDUALS OVERCAME THE RESTRICTIVE GENDERED DEPICTIONS IMPOSED BY MALE CONTEMPORARIES, FORGING A LEGACY THAT ENDURES TO THIS DAY.

THE MEDIVAL WOMEN OF CYPRUS EXHIBITION STANDS AS AN HOMAGE TO THESE COURAGEOUS FIGURES. THOUGH THE CHRONICLES OF HISTORY ARE OFTEN SILENT REGARDING THEIR VOICES, THE IMPACT OF THEIR ACTIONS IS UNMISTAKABLE. THEIR DEEDS CHALLENGED A MALE-CENTRIC SOCIETY AND SHOOK THE VERY FOUNDATIONS OF ESTABLISHED SOCIAL STRUCTURES.

”





THE TURKISH CYPRIOT COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION (TCCA) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1976. IT IS A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE (COMPANY NUMBER 3851759) WITH CHARITY STATUS (CHARITY NUMBER 1080926), AND MORE RECENTLY, IT BECAME REGISTERED WITH LOCALITY (LOCALITY 03063). TCCA IS THE LARGEST TURKISH-SPEAKING CHARITY IN THE UK.

OUR RAISON D'ETRE IS TO SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH OUR SELF-FUNDED, INTERNALLY CREATED, AND EXTERNALLY MANAGED PROJECTS. THESE PROJECTS MUST PROVIDE A SPRINGBOARD FOR TURKISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE TO EITHER INCREASE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE OR GAIN TRAINING AND SUPPORT THAT WILL RESULT IN THEM NOT REQUIRING GOVERNMENT BENEFITS TO SURVIVE.

BY RECOGNISING DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY AND CONTACTING GOVERNMENT BODIES AND LOCALLY SYMPATHETIC NGO'S, THE TCCA WILL EVENTUALLY CREATE MORE FRESH PROJECTS AND OFFER HELP IN THE MOST DEPRIVED CORNERS OF OUR COMMUNITY.

WE AIM TO IMPROVE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM LIVES AND CONTRIBUTE TO A BROADER SOCIETY. OUR MEMORANDUM AND ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION SET OUT OUR COMPLETE CHARITABLE OBJECTIVES AND BREAKDOWN. COPIES OF THESE ARE AVAILABLE AT THE TCCA OFFICE FOR ANYONE WHO WISHES TO REVIEW THEM.

MAIN HEAD OFFICE: 628-630 GREEN LANES, HARINGEY N8 0SD.



OUR IMPACT SINCE 1976

1375
CARE PACKAGES MANAGED.

205
PROJECTS DEVELOPED.

13
COVID ORIENTED INITIATIVES

13.100
ROOM HIRE HOURS DELIVERED
(2019 ONLY)

£29.000.000+
FUNDS EXPENDED ON
PROJECTS.



NIYAZI ENVER



CHAIR OF TRUSTEES, TURKISH CYPRIOT COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

In our 50th anniversary year, The Turkish Cypriot Community Association is proud to sponsor the 'Medieval Women of Cyprus exhibition in London. The body of works highlights the role and influence of women throughout this period of history.

These artworks demonstrate the significant contributions women have made throughout history. Furthermore, they highlight the enduring, substantive relationship between Cyprus and Europe, emphasising its continued relevance. Although some might perceive the connection as tenuous, these images and accompanying research elucidate our understanding of reality. I want to take this opportunity to thank the artist Semra Bayhanli for creating these beautiful works, which have opened a window into a broader understanding of the medieval woman. I also want to thank Ahmet Hilmi for his painstaking research in putting this exhibition together. Finally, I thank all the companies and individuals who helped stage this event.

The Medieval Women of Cyprus exhibition continues a tradition of community-focused initiatives developed in collaboration with partner organisations, founded on mutual respect and

a commitment to preserving Cypriot heritage within the United Kingdom. Previously, we have jointly facilitated a range of arts, educational, music, folklore, and literary events that highlight our community's integration into the rich tapestry of contemporary British culture.

Diverse communities have played a significant role in shaping elements commonly regarded as British, including societal structures, culinary practices, musical influences, and cultural traditions. Our organisation is committed to promoting this collective heritage by emphasising shared values and the positive aspects of diversity. We also actively work to address and dispel negative stereotypes, discrimination, and misconceptions concerning the Turkish Cypriot community.



AHMET KEMAL HILMI



Cyprus, Europe's easternmost outpost has long been a crossroads of cultures. Over the ages, Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Lusignan French, Venetians, Ottomans, and the English have all passed through, each leaving their imprint on the island and its people. These conquerors walked the legendary lands associated with Aphrodite and Catherine of the Wheel, enjoyed the local wine, and spoke both fondly and critically about Cyprus's beauty. Today, museums from New York to Berlin and London to Istanbul display artefacts that showcase the island's vibrant and complex history.

Women's contributions in medieval Cyprus and Europe have frequently been overlooked in historical research, which has traditionally focused on male-dominated governments and institutions. Jane Austen, in her notable work *Northanger Abbey*, draws attention to this gender imbalance, noting: "The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all, it is very tiresome."

Medieval art and literature often depicted women through Judeo-Christian beliefs, focusing

less on the charm and intrigue of Venus and Ishtar and instead highlighting figures such as virgins, virtuous wives, or, in stark contrast, fallen women. Building on recent research into women's roles in politics and society, this work uncovers overlooked stories from Cypriot history, placing women at the centre of exploration. The heroines not only actively participated in political change but also defied the stereotype that political authority belongs only to men. Some stood against popes and kings, while others relied on intelligence to protect their families or showed unwavering love and self-sacrifice for Cyprus.

Our heroines embodied the classic traits of Cypriot women. Through Semra Bayhanlı's art and Ahmet Hilmi's storytelling, their voices finally break the silence. Women from Cyprus strive to be recognised as vital contributors to European sociopolitical history. Despite tracing their roots to France, Germany, Spain, and Italy, they remained steadfastly Cypriot and loyal citizens of 'Civitas Nicosie.' When describing them, we focused on lesser-known public moments in which women played important roles in Cypriot-European history.





SEMRA BAYHANLI

Throughout my student life, I did not like history classes. There is always a necessity for additions or corrections when recounting historical events. I questioned my teachers incessantly why, among the valiant, there were no women. Heroines were rare. It seems the fair sex(!) was invisible. Their family connections or marital status frequently identified women.

Then, the woman is a sinner! The one who tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, leading to their expulsion from Eden. It seems that within our Judeo-Christian Western psyche, women have carried the burden of the sins of humanity (!) since time immemorial.

The archaic laws regarding women's place in society, first fashioned by St. Paul and perpetuated by Church fathers and councils, firmly defined a woman's role as inferior to a man. In a world dominated by patriarchal social structures, women have been considered incomplete creatures, ignorant of body politics and their lifecycle—daughter, wife, mother, and widow—which men carefully crafted.

Yet, women whisper from the pages of history—all too hushed, maybe! These heroines implore us to approach history differently, saying, “We were there too. They hid our deeds and ignored us, but we were there!” With this project, we aim to give a voice to the voiceless. It encourages us to hear women's stories. Once we listen to them, they unravel a new way, a gendered approach, to history.

Through my brushstrokes, I sought to bring the stories of historical women protagonists to light for art and history enthusiasts. This collection features eight remarkable figures, though Cyprus's past is filled with many heroines. We hope this exhibition inspires future artists and historians. To capture each protagonist, I worked with real-life models and incorporated symbolic elements found in Cyprus' iconography.



AHMET KEMAL

HILMI



Ahmet is a medievalist and a lecturer. He graduated from Royal Holloway, University of London. Ahmet's research areas include medieval society and gender roles in the Kingdom of Cyprus.

History-Related Articles and Work in Progress:

- Women and the Pursuit of Power in the Thirteenth Century: The Case of Alice, Queen Regent of Cyprus (1218-1232), *Journal of Cyprus Studies* 13 (2007), pp. 1-26
- Into the Eye of a Storm: Raymond De Pins and the Cypriot fratricide.
- Taking arms against Stupor Mundi: The Battle of Agridi and its consequences to the crusading movement.
- The Materiality of Power: Women's seals in the Outremer
- Women and Status in Latin East: The Case of Cyprus, 1192-1432



SEMRA

BAYHANLI

Semra is a renowned Cypriot artist whose compositions have graced numerous galleries and public collections. She specialises in oil, watercolour, and surrealism.

She was born in the Kucuk Kaymakli region of Nicosia together with her twin sister, sculptor Sevcan Çerkez.

She completed her primary education at Ortakoy Primary School and her secondary education at the Nicosia Turkish Lycée.

After graduating from Ataturk Teacher Training Academy, Semra Bayhanlı worked as an arts teacher for 30 years. She felt a passion for art early on and put painting at the centre of her life. As a female cartoon artist in Cyprus, she has been featured in the country's leading publications. She further participated in group exhibitions at home and abroad and opened five personal exhibitions of oil and watercolour.



ADEM
HILMI, PHD



Adem Hilmi is a Lecturer in Music Technology. He holds an MA in Music from the City University of London and a PhD from Canterbury Christ Church University. His thesis is entitled “Designing Virtual Spaces: Redefining Radio Art Through Digital Control.”

Adem Hilmi has worked in multiple sectors within the music industry for 10 years. This includes A+R work, band management, sound design, and production. He ran a commercial recording studio in London for 10 years. His productions include records with The Libertines, Babyshambles, Peter Doherty, Amy Winehouse, and over two hundred new and up-and-coming artists. Adem’s compositions have been exhibited at distinguished venues such as Tate Modern and Roundhouse in London and Sydney Cooper Gallery in Canterbury. He has toured extensively in Europe and Cyprus.

Adem Hilmi designed and constructed a 5:1 surround sound installation for the Medieval Women of Cyprus exhibition. This incorporates 45 minutes of repeatable audio experience, including short musical extracts, a Foley sound design, Synthesis, and Dialog representing the narrative of the visual context. We intend to immerse the attendees in the three-dimensional sound aspect, including the era and the environment.



ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

A significant artistic challenge in representing medieval women of Cyprus lies in the scarcity of surviving contemporary depictions, with Duchess Anne of Savoy and Queen Caterina Cornaro as notable exceptions. Throughout this project, what initially seemed like a limitation evolved into an opportunity for creative interpretation. My process typically involves conceptualising the subject internally, foregoing preliminary sketches and proceeding directly to the final composition.

I carried extensive research into the characters' backgrounds was conducted during the project's design phase. To gain a thorough understanding of their lives, each artwork first focused on the main protagonists. I also examined detailed biographies and had insightful historical conversations with Ahmet Hilmi to deepen my understanding.

I conducted extensive research on the clothing of the period. While Western museums and private collections provide substantial material evidence, murals and paintings serve as the most reliable sources for analysing worn fabrics.

My inquiry necessitated a detailed examination of specific elements of garments and jewellery, such as the application of silk textiles in the 1200s. To address this, I investigated the historical development of silk fabric. Likewise, the study of jewellery styles and iconography involved significant challenges.

Due to pandemic restrictions, models for our project were chosen from my local environment. Engaging with these distinguished women—both those with notable past achievements and contemporary leaders—proved exceptionally rewarding. Notably, each principal model seamlessly became involved in the project, reflecting a purposeful connection.

When initiating a painting, I first conceptualise the primary subject, with a pivotal moment occurring as it emerges on the canvas. It is essential to accurately convey the model's facial expression and emotional state at that precise instant. Upon completion of the central figure, the creative process evolves through improvisation, allowing secondary figures to be thoughtfully developed in sequence.



Once the main character is finished, the next stage relies purely on improvisation. Introducing supporting characters often takes the painting in unexpected directions, sometimes leading to concepts I hadn't initially imagined.

The symbols I include in my paintings convey messages that deepen the composition as I work. These symbols often appeared to me unexpectedly during those enchanting moments—almost as if I had travelled back centuries. On this extraordinary journey, did I witness Queen Alice presenting that remarkable vine stem to the gentle knight?

A particularly notable aspect of my work on these paintings was the reconstruction of the Lusignan Palace façade in Nicosia for “Goodbye My Love,” which illustrates Caterina Cornaro’s departure from the city. The palace suffered neglect and partial dismantlement during the British administration in Cyprus. Today, several of its architectural elements are conserved at the Lapidary Museum in Nicosia. Owing to the foresight of George Jeffery—who arranged for the preservation of the high Gothic window, the Lusignan coat of arms, and additional significant features within the museum—I was able to engage directly with these artefacts.

My goal was to showcase our country’s rich heritage and the extraordinary women who shaped it, appealing to art and history enthusiasts. This project has truly been a labour of love, encouraging fresh reflections on history and the evolving roles of women in society. No longer are figures like Alice, Anne, and Arnalda of Cyprus remote or abstract; I present medieval women as complex individuals rather than stereotypes. Much like women today, they were active members of their communities—building relationships, engaging in daily life, and ultimately contributing to Cyprus’ enduring legacy. Each woman represents an essential part of our shared identity.

I hope that future generations experience the same emotions we do. In this sense, it’s a pleasure to collaborate on this project. My heartfelt thanks go to Ahmet Hilmi. I am also deeply grateful to my husband, Osman Bayhanlı, for his patience, and to my twin sister’s husband, Mustafa Çerkez, for creating the two-meter-tall canvases; their support has been truly invaluable.

Semra BAYHANLI



THE MODELS WHO TOOK PART IN THE PAINTINGS

ALICE

ZEYNEP ARIK

PLAISANCE

HATİCE TEZCAN

İZEL SEYLANI

ELEANOR

KIYMET KARABİBER

BUĞRA ÜNAL

YAĞMUR BAYHANLI

HELVIS

YAĞMUR ÇERKEZ

ÇAĞAN ÇERKEZ

AGNES-ANNA

LEYLA HİLMİ

BERNA ZEKİ

AREN ÇERKEZ

LİLA ŞAH ÇERKEZ

CATHERINA

CORNARO

DENİZ DÜZGÜN

CEMİL BAYHANLI

HAZAL HASTÜRK

LAVİN ÇERKEZ

TAİR ŞENBÜLBÜL

EMİR ŞENBÜLBÜL

ARNALDA

BUĞU ŞAH



1193C
1246

ALICE OF CHAMPAGNE, QUEEN OF CYPRUS

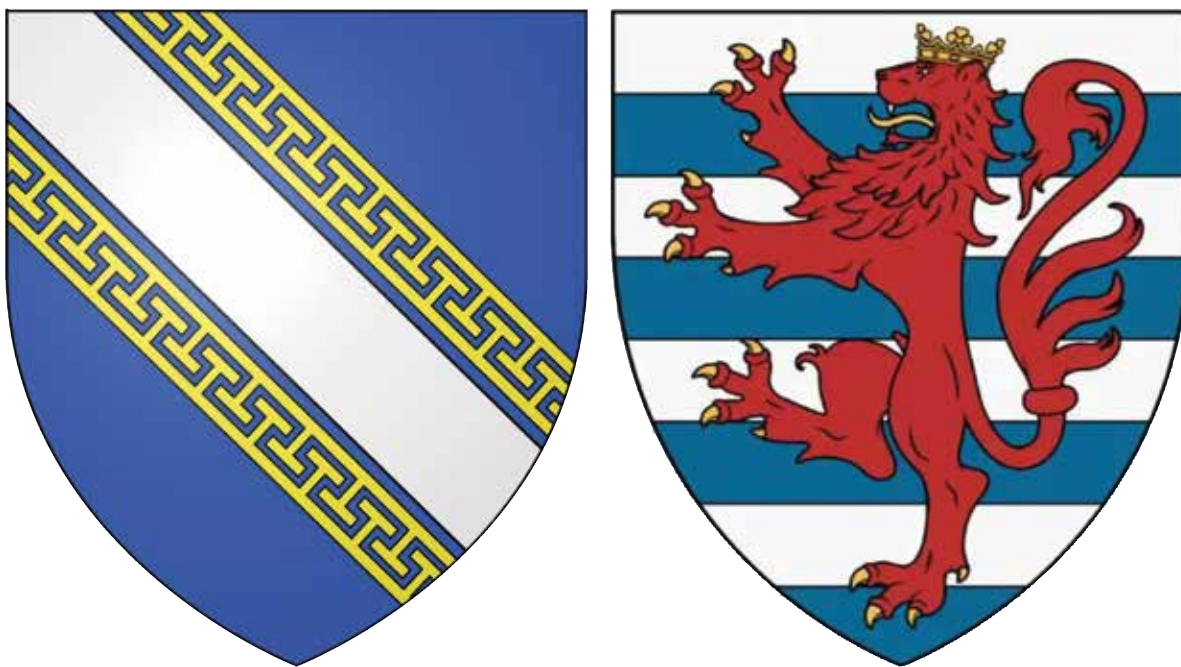


A CRUSADING
QUEEN, DAUGHTER
OF THE CHURCH,
USURPER OF
REGENCY,
INCONTROLLABLE
WIDOW,
NIGHTMARE
OF POPES AND
PRINCES.

REMEMBER ME

160x220

COAT OF ARMS OF THE COUNTY OF CHAMPAGNE AND THE LUSIGNAN KINGDOM OF CYPRUS



Alice

Alice, daughter of Count Henry of Champagne and Queen Isabel of Jerusalem, held significant claims to both Jerusalem and Champagne. In 1210, following the death of her mother, she married Hugh, the King of Cyprus; the union had been arranged by their respective parents before they were born. Her status made her a prominent figure within the rising kingdom of Cyprus and the County of Champagne. Historical accounts, such as those of the chronicler Machairas, attribute to Alice the initiation of the construction of St. Sophia (Selimiye) Cathedral and the introduction of Gothic architectural elements to Cyprus.

King Hugh passed away during the Fifth Crusade in 1218, leaving Alice widowed while still in her twenties. Due to her youth and limited experience in governance, she delegated certain powers to her maternal uncles, John and Philip of Ibelin. Alice subsequently focused her efforts on maintaining her claim to the regency of Cyprus and Jerusalem, as well as securing her paternal inheritance from the County of Champagne. In pursuing these objectives, she encountered resistance from various quarters, including the pope, her uncles, her aunt Countess Blanche of Champagne, and King Louis IX of France.

Alice governed Cyprus during a particularly unstable period in the Latin East, when the nobility entered a struggle for mastery with the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, resulting in considerable political upheaval. The fall of Jerusalem significantly destabilised the

foundations of Christendom. Ongoing conflicts between Emperor Frederick II and the Ibelins further undermined Christian unity, gradually enabling the kingdom's aristocracy to consolidate power. These developments contributed to the weakening and eventual collapse of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Queen Alice has often been depicted negatively by chroniclers aligned with Ibelin interests. Modern historiography also attributes to her various so-called 'womanly sins.' Nevertheless, analysis of her charters, papal correspondence, and additional documentation indicates that she was an intelligent, strategic, and ambitious leader who actively defended her rights in a male-dominated society. During a period when political authority was largely associated with masculine qualities, Pope Honorius III recognised her wisdom and effectiveness during the ecclesiastical crises of 1221, commending her for governing admirably despite prevailing gender expectations.

Queen Alice broke through societal barriers that excluded women from positions of authority. As a regent in a politically divided society, her rights were officially recognised, but she faced ongoing opposition from the local nobility, determined to maintain their independence at the expense of the crown's interest.



Especially when the claimant was a woman with limited means. Determined not to be merely an emasculated figurehead, Alice understood early on that gaining wealth was crucial to fully exercising her power—a resource she initially lacked. She frequently pursued marriages that served her own interests rather than those of the Ibelin family. Despite being largely ignored by prominent leaders in Christendom, she persistently followed her path to empowerment. Her career is notable not only for her personal achievements but also for highlighting the Church's involvement in regional politics. Alice's steadfast pursuit of rule during a period when baronial influence peaked in the Latin East merits greater recognition than historians have accorded it. Queen Alice died in Acre in 1246 and was interred alongside her husband, King Hugh I, in the Hospitallers' Church of St John, Nicosia. Until her passing, she continued to use the title Queen of Cyprus.

Alice is notable for being a rare medieval woman regent who governed several crusader states. Her career shows:

- The intricate political dynamics of the Crusader states
- Women played an important, yet frequently unnoticed, part in shaping medieval governments.
- The tenuous equilibrium between regional nobility and European monarchs in the Eastern Mediterranean
- Her life is often examined as an example of female political agency during the 13th century.

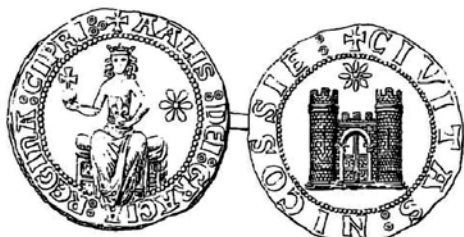
THE ICONOGRAPHY OF “REMEMBER ME.” A

young knight of modest means, in worn armour, wished to marry the daughter of a prosperous noble. When her father learned of their intentions, he rejected the knight and threatened him with violence. Recognising the need for influential support, the knight sought patronage and protection from the queen. However, the recently widowed queen lacked significant political power, as her uncles, the Ibelins, held authority over key departments within the Lusignan state.

Her influence waned further under the pope's scrutiny of her legitimacy. She was accused of being a product of an illegal marriage. In this context, the queen could only offer the knight refuge within her familial lands in the County of Champagne. As a parting gesture, Queen Alice presented the knight with a vine sapling grown from the Cyprus soil, her adopted homeland. Semra's imagery draws on local traditions linking Champagne's wine production origins to historical ties with Cyprus in the Middle Ages. The sapling symbolises the connection between the queen's ancestral and adopted lands. She instructed the knight to plant the vine in the fertile earth of her ancestral home, so that the resulting wine would evoke memories of his beloved lover, the generous queen, and the bitter legacy of the island.



The Seal of Alice



The red wax seal, produced in Acre in November 1234, measures 50 mm in diameter and is attached to a charter about her interests in France.

The legend reads.

† AALIZ: DEI: GRACIA: REGINE: CIPRI .

The seal's strong French imagery is evident from its use of the fleur-de-lys. This symbol has several interpretations: the inverted triangle at the base stands for water, while the two crosses represent 'conjunction and spiritual achievement', with the flower itself pointing toward heaven. The fleur-de-lys was associated with enlightenment and served as an emblem of the lord, signifying Capetian royalty. On noble women's seals, it stood for female virtue and spirituality because of its association with Christianity's central female figure, the Virgin Mary. By incorporating it into her seal, Queen Alice projected themes of motherhood, fertility, and Capetian royal power, tracing these qualities back to her ancestor, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Unlike her contemporaries, the queen is portrayed seated with her hair loose and without a veil. She is depicted wearing a crown, seated on a simple

cushioned bench throne. In her right hand, she holds a globus cruciger, representing Christian authority, while her left hand carries a fleur-de-lys rather than a sceptre, which nevertheless signifies royal authority. This iconography is notable for its resemblance to French seals of the same era, underscoring her lineage to the French monarchy and illustrating the artistic exchange between France and Acre.

On the reverse, the depiction of a fortress or fortified castle represents the locus of her secular authority. The inscribed legend states, + CIVITAS NICOSSIE.

The fleur-de-lys displayed on city doors and gateposts denotes her French royal dominion over the capital.

Alice stands atop an uninscribed headstone carved from gypsum crystal. During the Middle Ages, gypsum of Cyprus—often carved with Latin inscriptions—was widely used to craft effigies for the Lusignan nobility. The symbolism of this stone is significant: it reflects Queen Alice's mortality and her enduring connection to the island.

In biblical representations, the apple is often associated with themes such as faith, growth, temptation, knowledge, wisdom, and the fall from grace. It functions as a metaphor for sin and evil.



Within Christian tradition, the apple holds similar symbolic value. Early church fathers utilised this imagery to delineate women's roles in society, contrasting figures regarded as sinless, such as the Virgin Mary, with Eve, who was punished by divine expulsion from the Garden of Eden for her act of temptation.

In her artistic interpretation, Semra places the uneaten apple behind the queen in a position of reverence, symbolically signifying salvation for Alice, who, amid the high and mighty's persistent attacks on her legitimacy, maintained her determined stance for righteousness. Champagne Moment (Floribunda) is a fragrant rose variety inspired by Alice's ancestral heritage. This cultivar survives in Cyprus's arid soil conditions. When in full bloom, its buds exhibit a pale pink hue complemented by an apricot centre.

Selected Bibliography

The Chronicle of Amadi, Translated from Italian by Nicholas Coureas and Peter Edbury (Nicosia, 2015).

Christopher Schabel, Bullarium Cyprium: Papal Letters Concerning Cyprus 1196-1261, Vol. I, (Nicosia, 2010).

Guerra Di Federico II in Oriente (1223-1242), ed. Silvio Melani (Napoli, 1994).

Leontios Machairas, Recital Concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus, Entitled "Chronicle," ed. R. M Dawkins, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1932), 25, 29.

Christopher Schabel, Bullarium Cyprium:

Papal Letters Concerning Cyprus 1196-1261, V.I (Nicosia, 2010).

Ahmet Kemal Hilmi, "Women and the Pursuit of Power in the Thirteenth Century: The Case of Alice, Queen Regent of Cyprus (1218-1232)." *Journal of Cyprus Studies* 13 (2007), pp. 1-26

George Hill, A History of Cyprus, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

Peter Edbury, The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1374 (Cambridge, 1991).

Nicholas Savvas Coureas, The Latin Church in Cyprus, 1195-1312 (Oldershot, 1997).

Chris Schabel, "The Myth of Queen Alice and the Subjugation of the Greek Clergy on Cyprus," in *Actes Du Colloque "Identities Croisees En Un Milieu Meditteranean: Le Cas De Chypre"* eds. Gilles Grivaud and S Fourier, (Rouen, 2006)



1235C
1261C

PLAISANCE OF ANTIOCH, QUEEN OF CYPRUS

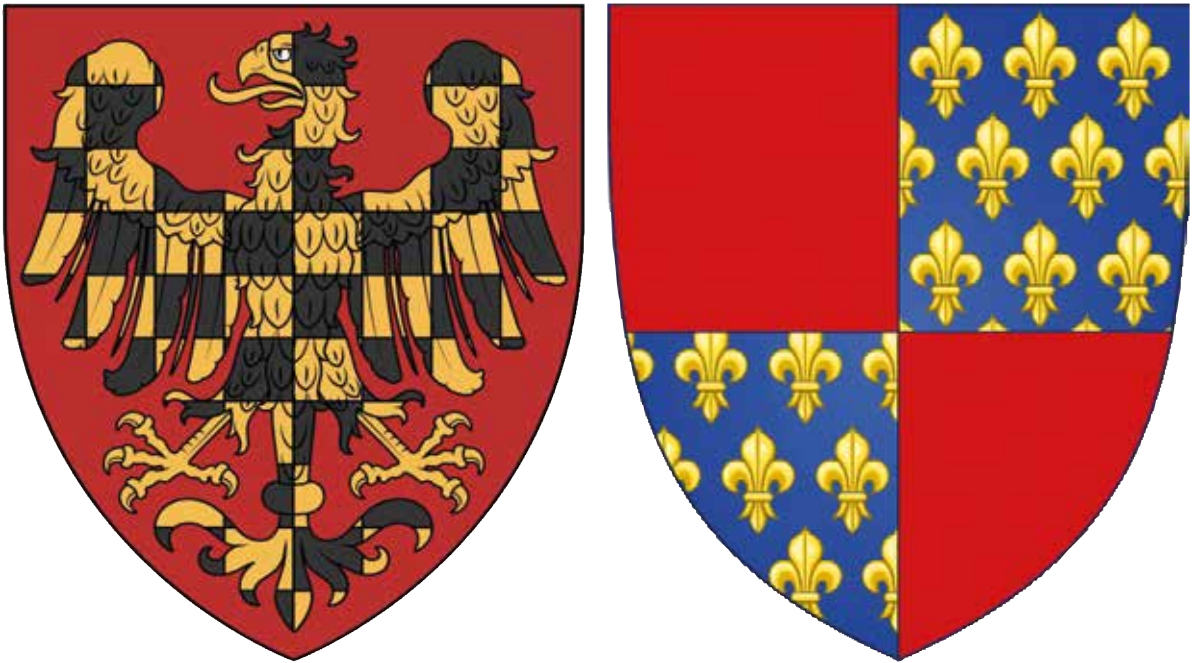


A LUSTFUL SINNER
CURSED BY THE
PAPACY.

LISTEN DAUGHTER

160X220

THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE COUNTS OF SEGNI AND THE PRINCIPALITY OF ANTIOCH



Plaisance

Plaisance was the daughter of Prince Bohemond, sovereign of the Principality of Antioch, and Princess Lucia of Segni. She was also the grandniece of Pope Innocent III. In 1250, Plaisance married King Henry I of Cyprus, the son of Queen Alice. This alliance was purposefully orchestrated to strengthen relations between Antioch and the House of Lusignan, countering both the challenges posed by local aristocratic factions and the expanding influence of Italian maritime republics, while enabling a unified response to the Islamic presence in the Near East.

Upon her husband's death in 1254, Plaisance was appointed regent for her infant son, the future Hugh II. In 1258, the High Court of the Kingdom of Jerusalem appointed her as regent. This made her the most influential woman in the Crusader states at the time.

She dedicated her remaining years to maintaining her authority and establishing influence among the regional lords, the papacy, and religious knightly orders. To secure her position, she married the powerful Balian of Arsuf, a local noble, in 1254. This was annulled by the pope. Thereafter, she attempted to arrange an advantageous marriage for herself and the Plantagenet English king's son, without success.

While serving as regent, Plaisance built connections with the papacy thanks to her maternal ties to Pope Innocent III, which were crucial for securing support in the turbulent Crusader states. These alliances elevated her status in the region, strengthened her diplomatic

influence with the Church, and established her reputation as a woman endorsed by Rome.

By forming strategic alliances with the Ibelin family in the Levant—through both marital and extramarital associations—she effectively strengthened connections between the royal family and two prominent regional families. The Ibelins possessed notable expertise in administration and military leadership, supported by comprehensive networks spanning Cyprus and Jerusalem. Although her extramarital dalliance, the Lord of Jaffa encountered the papacy's disapproval. During an era shaped by Church expectations that women model themselves after figures like the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, her conduct deviated from these norms. Consequently, her actions drew criticism and quickly became known throughout Europe; the Pope characterised her relationship with the Lord of Jaffa as improper, possibly issuing a papal bull, *Audi filia et*, to stress his concerns. Nonetheless, Plaisance demonstrated considerable political acumen as a crusader queen. She encouraged unity among rival crusader lords and the influential maritime powers of Genoa and Venice. Plaisance effectively leveraged diplomacy, intellect, and personal influence to maintain control and assert authority, contributing to peace between the Christian factions during the Wars of St Saba.

Plaisance died in 1261. During her tenure, she exerted significant political influence in an era marked by dynastic instability and external pressures. Her death concluded a notable episode of female leadership within the Latin East.



The Iconography of ‘Audi Filia Et,’ (Listen daughter.)

The imagery depicts Pleasance in the act of *Flagrante Delicto* (a conspicuous offence) with the Lord of Jaffa. The papal Bull, issued by either Pope Urban IV or Clement IV and located at the edge of the bed, instructs the Queen to abandon her sinful, unchaste behaviour and to embrace a life of chastity, or risk eternal damnation. For the complete text and summary translation, see C. Schabel’s *Bullarium Cyprium*, Vol. II, pp. 72–75. Papal documents, including bulls, were authenticated with a lead seal symbolising papal authority; the obverse features Saints Peter and Paul alongside the inscription *SANctus PAulus* and *SANctus PEtrus*, while the reverse displays the name of the issuing pope in Latin, accompanied by “PP” for *Pastor Pastorum*.

In “*Audi filia et*,” the motif of the bitten apple symbolises themes such as temptation, selfishness, cunning, and a perceived deficiency of faith, traditionally associated with women. The apple, as the instrument of temptation, is further associated with papal authority, reinforcing religious doctrines on grace and transgression.

Plaisance’s head rests on a Cypriot-designed pillow called *Lefkara Work*, still made across the island.

Selected Bibliography

Christopher Schabel, *Bullarium Cyprium: Papal Letters Concerning Cyprus 1196-1261*, Vol.II (Nicosia, 2010).

Crusader Syria in the Thirteenth Century, in *The Rothelin Continuation of the History of William of Tyre with Part of the Eracles or Acre text*. Janet Shirley ed. (Ashgate 1999).

The ‘Templar of Tyre:’ Part III of the ‘Deeds of the Cypriots,’ Paul Crawford (Trans.), (Ashgate, 2003)

Hans Eberhard Mayer, “Ibelin versus Ibelin”. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. Vol. 122, no. 1. (2978) pp. 51–56.

Peter W Edbury, (1997). *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem*. The Boydell Press (Woodbridge, 1997). pp. 96–97.

Christopher Schabel, *Queen Pleasance of Cyprus, and the Bulla Cypria*” in *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, Eds. Susan B. Edgington and Helen J. Nicholson, (Ashgate 2014). pp. 155-168.

Selected Bibliography



1333
1417

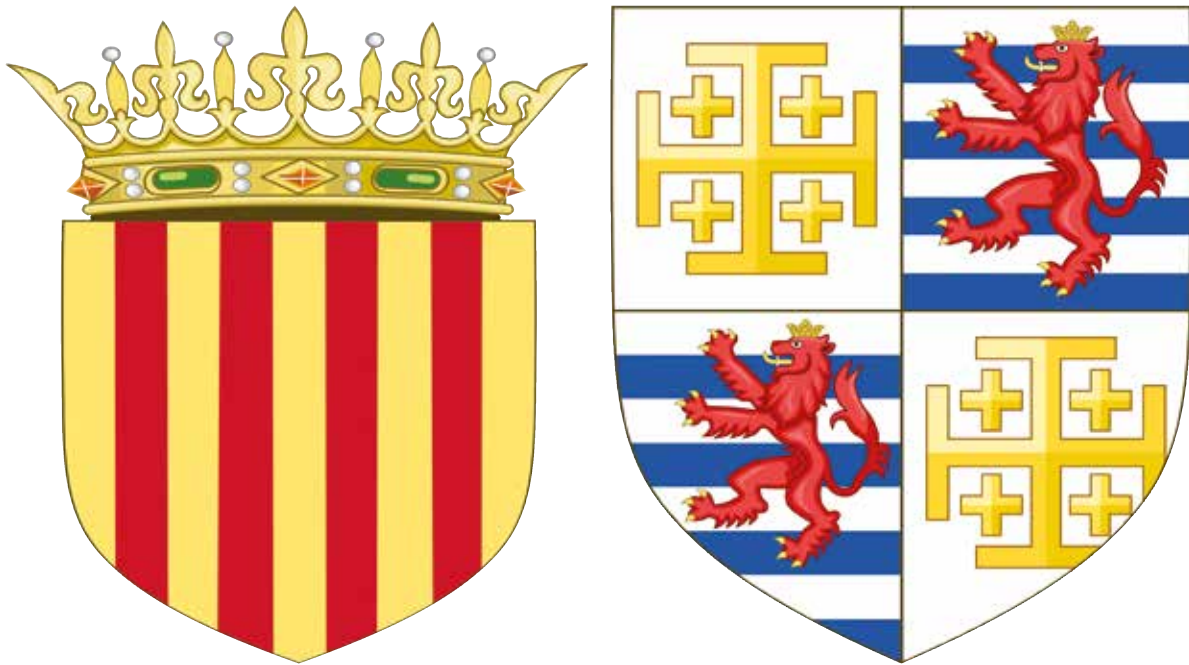
ELEANOR OF ARAGON, QUEEN OF CYPRUS



LOVER: SCHEMER;
VENGEFUL;
ADULTERER.

THE WOMAN
SCORNED
160x220

ARMS OF ARAGON AND THE KINGDOM OF CYPRUS



Eleanor

Eleanor, born in 1333 to Peter of Barcelona and Joan de Foix, was a member of the royal House of Barcelona. In 1353, King Peter IV of Aragon negotiated her marriage to the renowned King Peter I of Cyprus, aiming to advance political and economic interests in the Near East. As a result of this union, she assumed the titles of Queen of Cyprus and Jerusalem.

Historical accounts suggest that the two shared a strong affection. In the King's absence during extended travels abroad, Peter reportedly kept Eleanor's nightgown nearby as he slept. During these periods, Eleanor served as regent of the kingdom. However, this idealised depiction does not fully align with the complexities of their relationship. Peter had a reputation for engaging in numerous extramarital affairs, including relationships with the spouses of members of the aristocracy.

King Peter was regarded as a notable crusading monarch, a reputation reflected in both folklore and contemporary literature. However, his unpredictable governance and disregard for the island's nobility ultimately led to his violent death. On January 17, 1369, the senior aristocrats, supported by the king's brothers, entered his bed chamber while he was asleep with his mistress and murdered him. Some historians suggest that this action was a response to his rampant infidelities.

Although historical accounts suggest she may not have been a total innocent. She is said to have been Count John of Morphou's lover

during periods when her husband attended royal courts in Europe. Additionally, while the king was abroad, it is reported that Eleanor confined Peter's pregnant mistress at Kyrenia Castle, driven by concerns that the mistress's child might be considered for succession ahead of her own son.

After the king's death, the queen coldheartedly went after the murderers, particularly Prince John, ultimately ordering John's violent assassination. Subsequently, Eleanor acted as regent for her son, Peter II, until he reached the age of majority. During her regency, she employed considerable strategic acumen and determination to retain authority. In seeking to secure her position, she entered into an alliance with the Genoese, a decision that contributed to the Republic of Genoa's conquest of Cyprus in 1273 and eventually influenced the island's subsequent decline. 1381, Eleanor's son, Peter II, forced her from Cyprus to Catalonia. Thereafter, she ruled the city of Valls as its Lady. She died in 1416 in Barcelona.

In historiography, Queen Eleanor's legacy is regarded as complex. She twice served as regent, actively working to secure her son's inheritance. Her regencies demonstrated the significant—if precarious—political authority a queen consort could wield in a crusader kingdom.

Her most significant legacy may have been her choice to invite the Republic of Genoa to intervene in Cyprus following her husband's assassination. Although this measure was intended to seek retribution against King Peter I and to reinforce her



authority, it instead led to a Genoese invasion and the prolonged occupation of key Cypriot regions, notably Famagusta. Contemporary sources indicate that she later recognised the Genoese sought control rather than support, culminating in extensive plundering and considerable political disruption.

Eleanor played a pivotal role in securing the succession of her son, Peter II of Cyprus, thereby maintaining the Lusignan dynasty during a tumultuous era. Her daughter, Margaret, assumed the title of Countess of Tripoli, further expanding the family's sphere of influence. Scholars differ in their assessments of Eleanor's political acumen; some regard her as a competent and assertive leader adept at managing a volatile court, while others characterise her approach as vindictive and politically imprudent, particularly in relation to the Genoese alliance that contributed to instability in Cyprus. Her legacy exemplifies the significant impact that personal and dynastic strategies could have on the trajectory of a medieval kingdom.

Iconography of 'The Woman Scorn.'

In 'The Woman Scorned', Semra portrays the dramatic death of Peter I, the crusading king of Cyprus, whose notable campaigns included the capture of Alexandria and parts of southeastern Anatolia. During his reign, the Kingdom of Cyprus maintained a presence among the Islamic Turkish states. The rug in the artwork symbolises the kingdom's connections to the Near East through trade, culture, and material exchange. Additionally, the painting depicts the key protagonists in Peter's downfall, including the wronged Queen Eleanor, Peter's brother, John (Prince of Antioch),

James of Norres, who castrated Peter, and Echine de Scandelion, the king's grief-stricken mistress.

The bedroom window at the royal palace of La Cava in Nicosia perfectly illustrates the grandeur and lofty style of Gothic architecture. As a new day begins, it marks the close of one chapter for Cyprus and the rise of Eleanor's influence, setting the stage for intrigue, betrayal, and a relentless drive for survival.

The dog positioned beside the bed serves as an emblem of Cypriot loyalty to the queen, regardless of her transgressions.

Selected Bibliography

The Chronicle of Amadi, Translated from Italian by Nicholas Coureas and Peter Edbury (Nicosia, 2015).

Leontios Machairas, Recital Concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus, Entitled "Chronicle," ed. R. M Dawkins, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1932).

Guillame de Machaut, The Capture of Alexandria, Peter W. Edbury and Janet Shirley, eds. And trans, (Aldershot 2010).

Peter W. Edbury, The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191–1374. (Cambridge University Press, 1991) George Hill, A History of Cyprus, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940). pp. 308-430.

Renate Blumenfeld- Kosinski and Kiril Petkov, Philippe de Mezieres and His Age: Piety and Politics in the Fourteenth Century, (Brill 2012), pp. 394-395, 399.

Peter Edbury, "Murder of King Peter I of Cyprus," in Kingdom of the Crusaders: from Jerusalem to Cyprus, (Ashgate, 1999). XIII.



1353
1421

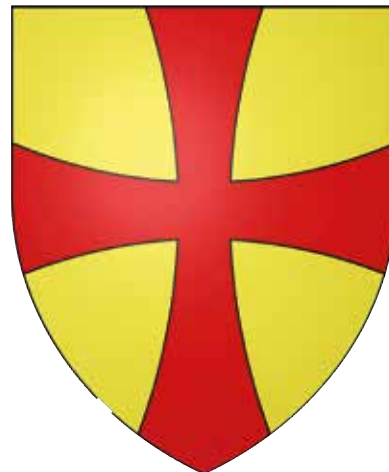
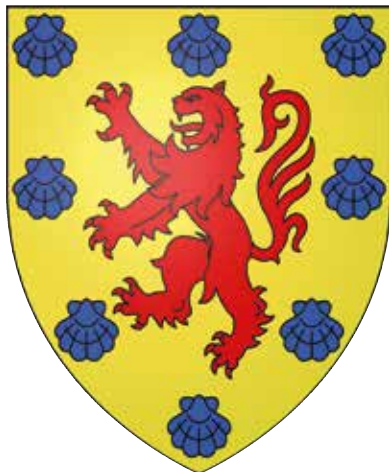
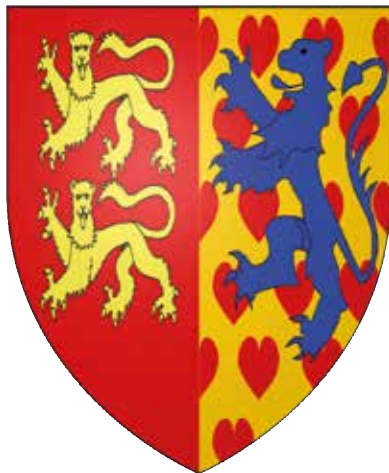
HELVIS OF BRUNSWICK-GRUBENHAGE, QUEEN OF CYPRUS



IMPECCABLE
CRUSADING
HERITAGE;
LOYAL, DEVOTED,
SUFFERING WIFE;
SERIAL MOTHER!

THE DEVOTED
WIFE
160x220

THE COAT OF ARMS OF BRUNSWICK - GRUBENHAGE,
THE KINGDOM OF CYPRUS (PRE 1393),
DAMPIERRE AND THE HOUSE OF IBELIN



Helvis

Queen Helvis OF Cyprus was born in 1353. She descended from distinguished crusading nobility of the esteemed houses of Brunswick-Grubenhagen and Dampierre. Her father, Philip, served as Constable of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. After the death of Helvis' mother, Helvis of Dampierre.

In 1365, aged 12, she married King James I of Cyprus, the son of Alix of Ibelin. The marriage required a papal dispensation from Pope Urban V. Helvis and James were related in the second degree of consanguinity. Their union began in difficult circumstances. Although James was appointed one of the regents for his nephew, Peter II, Queen Eleanor held him responsible for her husband's death. She conspired with the Republic of Genoa to suppress Cyprus' opposition to the Genoese involvement on the island through military force. James bravely defended the island against the Genoese but was eventually captured with Helvis on Rhodes in 1374. According to Amadi's chronicle, James was imprisoned in the notorious *la Mal Paga* ("The Bad Pay"), while Helvis supported him by cooking and producing handicrafts to sell in the local market. The couple endured difficult conditions throughout their imprisonment. Helvis refused Genoa's offer to live in comfortable surroundings befitting her European nobility, choosing instead to stay with her husband in prison. Helvis and James were a loving couple. During their captivity, James and Helvis probably had twelve children, including King Janus of Cyprus, Marie of Lusignan (later Queen of Naples), and Princess Agnes of Lusignan. In 1365, following an agreement between the Cyprus Regency Council and Genoa, James and his family were released from imprisonment. Following Peter II's death in 1382 without an heir, James and Helvis were formally crowned in 1385 at St Sophia Cathedral in Nicosia.

After King Leo V of Armenia's death in 1393, James I was formally granted the titular crown of Armenia. Subsequently, Helvis held the titles of Queen of Cyprus, Jerusalem, and Armenia. These events led to the integration of the shields of Armenia, Jerusalem, and Cyprus, as well as the House of Lusignan, into Cyprus's coat of arms. She died in 1421 and was buried at the Dominican Monastery in Nicosia.

The iconography of 'The Devoted Wife.'

Semra's 'Devoted Wife' portrays Helvis and James tenderly embracing at Genoa's *La Mal Paga* prison, which was reserved for political prisoners and war captives. In the portrait, Helvis assisted her husband by producing textiles and selling her wares at the market. Notably, several of her children were born in Genoa, as indicated by the presence of an infant in a modest cradle, swaddled. James I's reputation was adversely affected by contemporary chroniclers. Amid periods of conflict and devastation, he launched several construction projects to enhance the royal family's reputation, with significant economic implications for islanders. To foreshadow the king's future conduct, Semra depicts Helvis presenting James with an apple, symbolising his future moral transgression.

Selected Bibliography

Leontios Machairas, *Recital Concerning the Sweet Land of Cyprus*, Entitled "Chronicle," ed. R. M Dawkins, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1932)., ff. 599-627.

The *Chronicle of Amadi*, Translated from Italian by Nicholas Coureas and Peter Edbury (Nicosia, 2015). pp.432-433.

Charles Perrat and Jean Richard (eds.), *Bullarium Cyprium*, Vol III: 1316-1378, (Nicosia, 2012). p.396.

Hill, A History of Cyprus, Vol. II (Cambridge, 1948). pp. 431-446



1418
1462

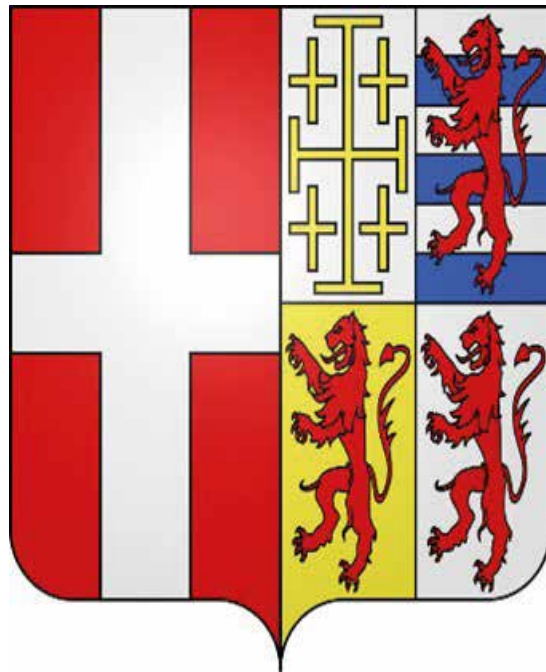
ANNE OF LUSIGNAN, PRINCESS OF CYPRUS, DUCHESS OF SAVOY,



RULER OF THE
ALPS; PATRON OF
THE CHURCH:
STRANIÈRI; THE
FOREIGNER; THE
SCORPION; THE
NEW MELUSINE;
THE WITCH.

THE HOLY
FAMILY
160x220

THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE DUCHY OF SAVOY AND THE KINGDOM OF CYPRUS



Anne

Anne was born in Cyprus in 1418. She was the daughter of King Janus of Cyprus and Charlotte of Bourbon. Anne married Louis, Count of Savoy, in 1434 at Chambéry. She entered Europe accompanied by her aunt, Agnes of Lusignan, along with a retinue of three hundred Cypriot musicians, cooks, and noblemen. As time passed, Louis, who had a greater affinity for poetry than for governance, delegated the management of state affairs to Anne. Driven by a longing for her homeland, Anne regularly organised receptions for fellow Cypriots. She undertook improvements to the castles, managed festivals, and provided gifts to guests, actions that elicited disapproval from both peasants and nobles in Vaud. Her adept administration and preference for Cypriot advisors were not well received by local lords and citizens. According to George Hill's *History of Cyprus*, Vol. II, "(Anne) a wonderful, extravagant and thoroughly mischievous woman, the influence which she and her Cypriote companions had on the affairs of the Duchy seems to have been deplorable, and their morals scandalised contemporary society." Among the local population, she became known as *The Scorpion* or *The Foreigner*, reflecting their dissatisfaction.

Anne was a devout Catholic. In 1452, she bought the Shroud of Christ (Shroud of Turin) from Jeanne de Charny in exchange for the castle of Varambon. Subsequently, she donated the relic to the church. Semra portrays her showing the newly acquired item to her prelate in the presence of her aunt Agnes and two of her nineteen children: the future king of Cyprus, Louis of Geneva, and Charlotte, the Queen of France. The Queen of France wears a white gown that denotes her purity before her marriage to Louis XI of France. She is shown beside her great-aunt, Agnes, holding a book. Anne's female prodigies are renowned for their love of learning. Charlotte left a large corpus of manuscripts which would eventually form part of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. Her daughter, Anne of France, was

likewise a keen educator of noble girls. She is renowned for writing *Lessons for My Daughter*, an instruction book for her daughter.

Anne had nineteen children. In 1451, to reduce her debts, she arranged a marriage for her ten-year-old daughter Charlotte to the Dauphin of France, the future King Louis XI. Her progeny scattered around the royal courts of Europe. Anne's descendants include Mary, Queen of Scots; François I; Louis XIV of France; and possibly Princess Diana and Winston Churchill. She was a patron of the arts and culture and a Renaissance ruler. She died at age forty-four in Geneva, Switzerland.

Agnes, Princess of Cyprus, and Abbess of Wunstorf, 1382-1459

Agnes of Lusignan was one of twelve children born to James I of Cyprus and Helvis of Brunswick.

Although Agnes never married, she served as an advisor on governance and political matters to her brother, King Janus, and later to her nephew, King John II. Princess Agnes' life spanned a period of significant unrest in Cypriot history, marked by several outbreaks of plague between 1392 and 1422 that severely affected the island. During the Mamluk invasion of 1426, Agnes sought refuge in Kyrenia Castle alongside the royal family, including Princess Anne. In 1436,

Spanish traveller Pero Tafur visited Cyprus and stayed at Agnes' palace. He states, "The lady was very noble, and never married but remained a spinster, and was always of the king's councils, and generally ruled the kingdom as she would."

Agnes played a prominent advisory role in her niece Princess Anne's marriage to Count Louis of Geneva and escorted Anne to Savoy. She guided and advised her niece and her family throughout her stay in Europe. Agnes, Princess of Cyprus, and Abbess of Wunstorf, 1382-1459





St Katherine of Alexandria and St. Mary Magdalene By Konrad Witz, c. 1440, Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame, Strasbourg

Konrad Witz's 1461 painting, *The Sacred Conversation*, portrays Agnes as St. Catherine, educating the young members of the Lusignan/Savoy family- Princess Anne as StMadeleine. Semra also imagined her heroine draped in St. Catherine's mantle. Agnes maintained a strong connection to the saint. Her royal palace in Nicosia is among the most noteworthy examples of 15th-century extant domestic architecture in Cyprus. Above its main entrance, a now-damaged four-sided coat of arms of the royal family once hung. The residence is adjacent to St. Catherine's Church and the former pilgrim lepers' hospital complex.

At seventy-seven, Princess Agnes, the Abbess of Wunstorf, died in Venasca (Italy) in 1459

Selected Bibliography

The Chronicle of Amadi, Trans. by Nicholas Coureas and Peter Edbury (Nicosia, 2015)

Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, (Isha Books, reprint 2013)

Michele Brocard and Catherine Marçais, *Anne de Chypre de Savoie 1418-1462: Regard d'une femme sur son temps*, (Cabedita, 1994).

Donatella Taverna, *Anna di Cipro: L'Eterna Straniera*, (Jaca Book, 2007)

Hill, *A History of Cyprus, Vol. II* (Cambridge, 1948). pp. 494-495



1454
1510

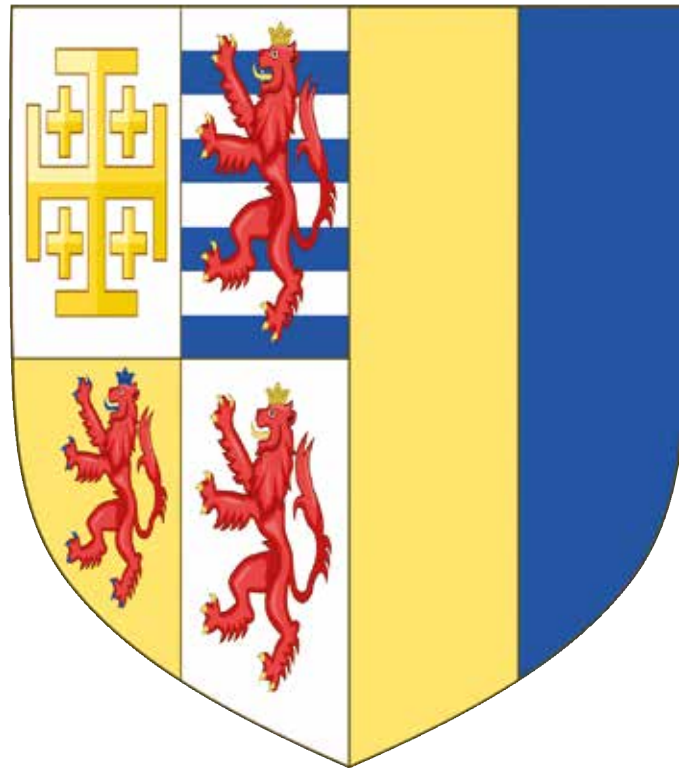
CATERINA CORNARO, QUEEN OF CYPRUS, LADY OF ASOLO



DAUGHTER OF
ST. MARK, QUEEN
OF CYPRUS,
JERUSALEM,
AND ARMENIA;
LADY OF ASOLO;
RENAISSANCE
PATRON

GOODBYE
MY LOVE
160x220

THE COAT OF ARMS REPRESENTING
THE KINGDOM OF CYPRUS AND THE HOUSE OF CORNARO



Caterina

Caterina was born in 1454 to Venetian nobles Marco Cornaro and Fiorenza Crispo. Following protracted negotiations between King James II of Cyprus and Caterina Cornaro's father, she wed the king in Famagusta in 1474.

The Cornaro family sustained substantial political and commercial affiliations with the Lusignan court and possessed extensive sugar cane estates on the island, including the fiefdom of Episcopia, granted by the King after previously being held by the Ibelins. Francesco Cornaro was interred at the Arabahmet Mosque (formerly a medieval church) in Nicosia in 1390. This branch of the family became known as Cornaro Piscopia. Significantly, Elena Cornaro Piscopia, a distinguished member of this noble lineage, was among the first women to receive a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Padua in 1678.

Caterina's marriage to James II was short-lived, ending unexpectedly with his death under unexplained circumstances. Prior to his passing, James appointed Caterina regent for their unborn child, who was intended to ascend the throne as James III. Following the child's premature death, Caterina assumed the role of the island's final monarch, governing from 1474 until 1489.

During her reign as Queen of Cyprus, Caterina faced persistent difficulties stemming from internal socioeconomic issues, external interventions by the Venetian and Catalan states, and concerns about potential Ottoman or Spanish military action. Ultimately, despite her personal misgivings, Venice forced the widowed queen to abdicate and relocate there, where she was expected to adopt a more

refined lifestyle than that in Cyprus. On 14 March 1489, Caterina officially transferred her rights to the Serene Republic. According to contemporary records, on 15 February 1489, the queen departed from Nicosia for Famagusta to prepare for her departure from Cyprus.

As she left her capital, Caterina demonstrated a measured response to the evident esteem her subjects showed her. The queen was visibly affected by the regard her people held for her. Caterina travelled on horseback, attired in a black silken cloak, accompanied by members of her court, including ladies and knights. Observers noted that she exhibited visible emotion throughout the procession, and many in attendance were similarly affected.

Caterina was well known for her strong love of Cyprus and for her deep immersion in its culture, serving as a bridge between Europe and the Levant. Later portraits often show her dressed in elegant Eastern garments, likely influenced by the island's customs.

In Venice and later in the small Dolomite hill town of Asolo, where she ruled as the Lady of Asolo, she played an important role as a Renaissance patron, opening her courts to artistic and cultural innovation. Famous artists such as Dürer, Titian, Bellini, and Giorgione painted her. The interest in the Queen did not cease with the passing of time. In the 19th century, composers like Gaetano Donizetti and Fromental Halévy wrote operas about her life. Scores of books celebrate her life and times. Her remarkable legacy continues to inspire the literary world, reaching far beyond Venice and Cyprus.

Caterina Cornaro died in Venice in 1510 and was interred at the Church of San Salvatore. Her simple marble tomb bears the inscription: "Caterina Cornaro, Queen of Cyprus, Jerusalem, and Armenia."



Caterina Cornaro is recognised for her distinctive political position, significant cultural impact, and notable status within both Venetian and Cypriot historical contexts. She is regarded as one of the Renaissance era's most prominent female leaders, remembered for her tenure as the last Queen of Cyprus, her contributions to the arts, and her role in complex political dynamics among competing empires.

In Venice, she is recognised as a distinguished noblewoman who advanced the Republic's interests and fostered a sophisticated cultural environment. Her portraits are widely displayed in museums and historical collections, underscoring her reputation as a Renaissance figure notable for her elegance, intellect, and political acumen.

Iconography of 'Goodbye My Love.'

The Goodbye My Love portrays Catherine's departure from Nicosia. Caterina's attire is inspired by descriptions from contemporary chroniclers. The portrait depicts the visible distress of her subjects and the queen's sombre demeanour. At this moment, a child presents Catherine with a Tulipa Cypria, a rare and protected flower native to Cyprus, whose bloom coincides with her departure. The narrative also includes a symbolic apple, traditionally associated with Christian themes, that a local girl gives as an additional gesture. Semra intentionally allows viewers to interpret these symbolic elements independently.

During the early twentieth century, the British authorities removed the remaining Lusignan royal palace due to its deteriorating condition. George Jeffery, Curator of Ancient Monuments, preserved architectural elements characteristic of the High Gothic style for display in the newly established Lapidary Museum in Nicosia. Currently, visitors

can observe the palace's internal columns, the upper section of the Gothic window, and the royal coat of arms representing the House of Lusignan, the Kingdom of Cyprus and Armenia, and the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Semra integrated the defining features of High Gothic architecture into the portrait, thereby honouring this significant era in architectural history.

Lusignan writers noted the lush gardens of Nicosia, nourished generously by the River Pedios. To capture the spirit of the era, Semra added a water fountain to the city square, echoing the many similar features found across continental Europe.

Selected Bibliography

A Narrative of the Chronicle of Cyprus by George Boustronios, 1456-1489, trans. By Nicholas Coureas (SHC, 2005)

Hill, A History of Cyprus, Vol. III (Cambridge, 1948). pp. 625-764. (for an extensive list of primary sources and historiography)

Antonio Cokbertaldo, Storia di Caterina Corner Regina di Cipro; Laprima biografia, (il Poligrafo, 202012)

Holly S. Hurlburt, Daughter of Venice: Caterina Corner, Queen of Cyprus, and Woman of the Renaissance, (Yale University Press, 2015)

Candida Syndikus and Sabine Rogge (eds.), Caterina Cornaro: Last Queen of Cyprus and Daughter of Venice, (Waxman, 2013)

David Hunt and Iro Hunt (eds.), Caterina Cornaro: Queen of Cyprus, (Trigraph, 1989)

Evangelia Skoufari (Ed.), La Serenissima a Cipro: Incontri di Culture nel Cinquecento, (Viella, 2013)



D.
1570

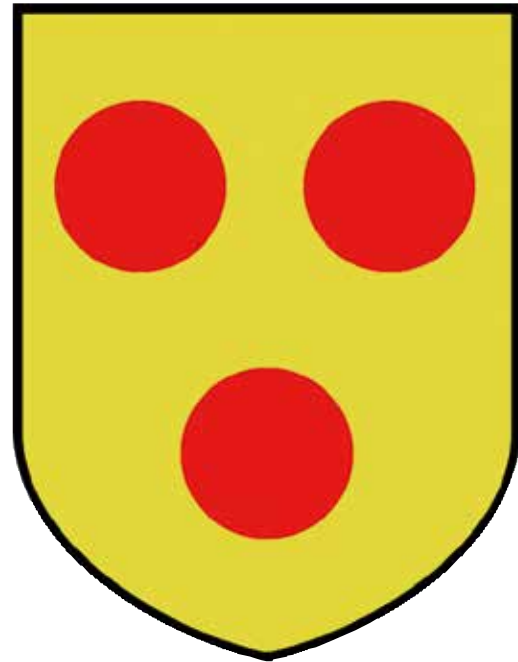
ARNALDA DE ROCHAS



HEROIC DAUGHTER
OF CYPRUS, "...SAW
MANY MASTERS,
NEVER LOST HER
HEART."

ARNALDA
ASCENDING
160x220

THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE AND THE COUNTY OF EDESSA



Arnalda

Arnalda is described in historical records as a legendary beauty and a gentlewoman from Nicosia. She was the daughter of Eugene Singlitico, who held the titles Lord of Morphou, Count of Rochas, and titular Count of Edessa. The legend associated with her originated in 1571, largely thanks to Sozomeno, who helped defend Nicosia against the Ottomans and was later captured by their forces. In different sources, Arnalda's name also appears as Oronta or Maria.

She was present during the Battle of Nicosia in 1570, where her father, commanding a portion of the defending forces, perished. Following the Ottoman capture, Lala Mustafa Pasha, the leader of the occupying troops, arranged for her transfer to Selim II, together with considerable loot and prisoners from Nicosia, mostly young men and women. According to Venetian accounts, the spoils obtained from the city ranked only behind those acquired at the fall of Constantinople.

Arnalda was transported on a galleon owned by the Grand Vezir of the Ottoman Empire, Sokollu Mehmet Pasha. It is said that on the 3rd of October 1570, she detonated the ship's arsenal near the Garden of Famagusta, resulting in the sinking of three Turkish vessels. The ensuing explosion had an impact that extended throughout the city and its surroundings.

Arnalda chose martyrdom rather than a life of servitude, even if that meant remaining in the relative comfort of the Seraglio. Her account

illustrates notable examples of 'feminine fortitude,' and reflects the resilience women displayed during the 1570-1571 war.

Contemporary historians recorded other instances in which women exhibited greater courage and valour than men. (See Luigi Robuschi, *Secular Heroines*). Arnalda's actions ultimately resulted in a minor pyrrhic victory for the Venetians, who nonetheless lost the island. The destruction of enslaved persons and the treasure ships of Lala Mustafa Pasha have become intrinsically linked to the legend of Arnalda.

The narrative of the gentlewoman from Nicosia who embraced martyrdom in such a heroic manner is perpetuated in literature. In the epic works of Manoli Blessi and Francesco Doni, she was depicted as a secular heroine of Venice and likened to saints such as St Catherine. In 1996, the Republic of Cyprus celebrated its martyrdom on a postage stamp. Arnalda's selfless act symbolised hope, and her devotion to liberty exemplified Cypriot womanhood, as shown by the heroines of Medieval Cyprus. They faced many masters but remained true to themselves.



The iconography of ‘Arnalda Ascending.’

Semra’s heroine is depicted in a white gown, a symbol of purity, as she ascends to paradise. The blue cape alludes to the Virgin Mary’s medieval iconography. her incorruptible, saintly character. The untouched apple at Arnalda’s feet symbolises love and beauty; wisdom and blessing; human choice and the creator’s redemption.



Selected Bibliography

Calepio in *Excerpta Cypria: Materials for A History of Cyprus* Trans. By Claude Delaval Cobham, (Cambridge, 1908). pp. 144-145

Lusignan’s *Chorography and Brief General History of the Island of Cyprus (A.D. 1583)* Trans. By Olimpia Pelosi (Greece and Cyprus Research Center, 2001), p. 123.

Hill, *A History of Cyprus, Vol. III* (Cambridge, 1948). pp. 984-987. (for an extensive list of primary sources and historiography)

Mary Hays, ‘Arnaude de Rochas,’ in *Female Biography, Vol III*, (Brych and Small, 1808). p.147.

Luigi Robuschi, *Secular Heroines, and Christian Martyrs in the Venetian Mediterranean: Anna Erizzo and Arnalda of Rochas*, in *Nuova Rivista Storica, CVI 3*, Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2022, pp.1083-1130.



EXHIBITION SPONSORS



