
Cypriot Identity under the Lusignans after the Fall of Acre, 1291



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Abstract

This paper attempts to identify methods of accommodation and survival used by non-Frankish groups under Lusignan rule in Cyprus (1192-1489). The Lusignan kings sought to “return heretical Greeks to the true faith,” that is, the Latin Church, according to historian Lukasz Burkiewicz. Pope Honorius III subordinated the Greek, Syrian Melkite, Jacobite, Nestorian, and Maronite hierarchies in Cyprus and the fourteen Orthodox bishoprics were reduced to four. However, after the fall of Acre in Jerusalem in 1291, Cyprus absorbed numerous refugees of a variety of nationalities and faiths, including Jacobites, Armenians, Georgians, Maronites, Jews, Nestorians, and Melkites (Greek Orthodox but Arabic-speaking and culturally of the Arab Near East). As noted by Nicholas Coureas, most of these groups maintained cultural identification with their co-religionists and co-nationals outside Cyprus. Alexander Beihammer further explains that the Greek elite, especially, maintained ties with Byzantine institutions, although the combinations of local and new foreign influences (much of which was facilitated by the expansion of trade with both East and West) created new local identities. I propose that the extremely wide range of cultures, nationalities, and religions, as well as methods of accommodation including the formation of new identities, and the use of outside support systems made a total switch to Lusignan identity impossible to accomplish. The Greek Orthodox elite in particular negotiated policies of accommodation while working within the Lusignan-Frankish system and survived largely intact. Thus, after almost 500 years of Latin rule, the Greek Orthodox population was maintained and is still dominant in Cyprus today.

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