

# The Armenian History

In our 3000 year history, the Armenians have rarely played the role of aggressor, rather, they have excelled in agriculture, arts and crafts, and trade. Armenians have produced unique architectural monuments, sculptures, illuminated manuscripts, literature, and philosophical and legal tracts. Moreover, a number of important philosophical and scientific works from other cultures have survived only in their Armenian translations. In addition, the Armenians, because of their location and participation in international trade, have contributed to the cultural and scientific development of both the East and the West. College graduates and even teachers. However, know very little about Armenians of their history. Historians have traditionally concentrated their research on the record of conquerors that dominated or destroyed other nations. Thus, despite their accomplishments, the Armenians have been given less space in general history texts than the Mongols or the Vikings.

To be sure, the history of Armenia is a difficult one to reconstruct. Sources written before the invention of the Armenian Alphabet in the fifth century AD require a familiarity with Aramaic, Greek, Middle Persian and Syriac. Later sources demand the knowledge of Arabic, Latin, Georgian, Turkish, Modern Persian, Mongolian, Russian, French and German, as well as classical and modern Armenian. Valuable historical evidence has no doubt been destroyed by the numerous invasions of and earthquakes in the Armenian homeland. Furthermore, the divisions of historic Armenia among modern neighbouring states have made archival and archaeological research a sensitive, and often difficult, task. Moreover, the systematic application of modern historical research techniques to the study of Armenian history is but a recent phenomenon.

Armenia is one of the few small nations that have managed to survive repeated invasions, destruction, and persecutions. The Armenians have been described through the centuries as adaptable, resilient, enterprising and steadfast. How they managed to survive while larger and more powerful states disappeared, and how, at the same time, they were able to make significant contributions to world civilization, is the history of the Armenian people.

## The Origins of the Armenian People

As with many ancient peoples, the origins of the Armenians contain elements of myth and unresolved scholarly arguments. The explanations can be

grouped into three versions: The Greek, The Armenian and recent scholarly versions.

### **The Greek Versions**

Although some Greek sources maintain that Armenia was named after or founded by Armenus the Thessalian, one of Jason's Argonauts, Greek historians, all writing long after the appearance of the Armenians, but well before the written works of Armenian chroniclers, have left a number of historical explanations as to the origins of the Armenian people. Two of the most quoted versions are by Herodotus and Strabo. According to the fifth century BC historian, Herodotus, the Armenians had originally lived in Thrace from where they crossed into Phrygia in Asia Minor. They first settled in Phrygia and then gradually moved west of the Euphrates River to what became Armenia. Their language resembled that of the Phrygians while their names and dress was close to the Medes.

According to the historian Strabo, who wrote at the end of the first century BC, Armenians came from two directions, one group from the West, or Phrygia, and the other from the south, or the Zagros region. In other word, according to the ancient Greeks, the Armenians were not original inhabitants of the region. They appear to have arrived sometime between the Phrygian migration to Asia Minor following the collapse of the Hittite Empire in the thirteenth century BC and the Cimmerian invasion of Urartu in the eighth century BC.

### **The Traditional Armenian Version**

According to the earliest Armenian accounts, written sometime between the fifth and eighth centuries AD, the Armenian people are the descendants of Japheth, a son of Noah. After the Ark had landed on Mt. Ararat, Noah's family settled first in Armenian and, generations later, moved south to the land of Babylon. The leader of the Armenians Haik, a descendant of Japheth, unhappy with the tyranny and evil in Babylon, rebelled and decided to return to the land of the Ark. The evil Bel, leader of the Babylonians, pursued Haik. In the ensuing war, good conquered evil when Haik killed Bel and created Armenian nation. Haik became the first Armenian ruler and his sons continued to lead the Armenians until King Paruir, a descendent of Haik, formed the first kingdom of Armenia and had to face the mighty Assyrian foe.

### **Recent Scholarly Versions**

Modern archaeological finds in the Caucasus and Anatolia have presented sketchy and incomplete versions of the possible origins of the Armenians. Until the 1980s, scholars unanimously agreed that the Armenians were an Indo-

European group who either came into the area with the proto-Iranians from the Aral Sea region or arrived from Balkans with the Phrygians after the fall of Hittites. Some scholars maintain that *Hay or Hai is derived from Hai-yos* (Hattian). Hence, the Armenian during their migration over Hittite lands, adopted the name of the first empire. Others maintain that the Armeno-Phrygians crossed into Asia Minor, took the name Muskhi and concentrated in the Arme-Shupria region east of the Euphrates River where non-Indo-European words became part of their vocabulary. They stayed in the region until the Cimmerico-Scythian invasions altered the power structure. The Armenian managed to consolidate their rule over Urartu and, in time, assimilated most of its original inhabitants to form the Armenian nation. Therefore, Armenia and Armenians, the Perso-Greek name for the Armenians, derives from Arme-Shupria.

More recent scholarship offers yet another possibility, that the Armenians were not later immigrants, but were part of the original inhabitants of the region. Although this notion has gained some credibility in the last two decades, there remain a number of unresolved questions: What was the spoken language of the early Armenians? Are the Armenians members of a non-Indo-European dialect, or are they, as many believe, one of the native Indo-European speaking groups?

Further linguistic and archaeological studies may one day explain the exact origins of the Indo-Europeans and that of the Armenian people. Presently, western historians maintain that Armenians arrived from Thrace and Phrygia, while academics from Armenia argue in favour of the more nationalistic explanation; that is, Armenians are native inhabitants of his of historic Armenia.

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## **Between Roman Legions and Parthian Cavalry**

### **The Artashesids and the Formation of the Armenian Kingdom**

**(189 BC to AD 10)**

The last two centuries before the birth of Christ were a significant era in global civilization. The great Han Dynasty began its more than four hundred-year rule in China and the Yamato clan established the foundations of the first Japanese state. The Ptolemis continued to rule Egypt. Various invaders fragmented the Mauryan Empire in India, and elements of Hellenism were introduced to its north-western provinces. In Persia, the Parthians, who had emerged in the previous century, formed an empire under the Arsacid dynasty.

The most important development in the West was the rise of Roman Republic, which annihilated the Carthaginians in Africa, conquered Greece and Macedonia, and replaced the Seleucid State in Syria and Asia Minor. The same period witnessed the birth of the first recognized Armenian Kingdom and its new strategic importance to the powers that surrounded it.

The Yervandians had resisted Seleucid encroachment and kept Greater Armenia independent. The rise of Rome and its push into Greece and Macedonia threatened the Seleucid position in Syria. Antiochus III, the last noteworthy ruler of the line, attempted to restore the Seleucid Empire by halting the advance of the Parthians, who, by the second century BC, had gradually penetrated as far as central Persia. He then sought to extend his sovereignty over the autonomous regions bordering his domain. At the start of the second century BC, Antiochus succeeded in persuading some members of the Yervanduni family to challenge their head and to switch their allegiance to the Seleucid. Artashes (ARTAXIAS) and Zareh (ZARIADRES) accepted his offer, rebelled against the last Yervanduni, received military from Antiochus, and established themselves as governors of Armenia. Artashes took control of Yervandashat and all the territory of Greater Armenia, while Zareh took Sophene.

Rome recognized Artashes, who claimed relationship to both the Yervanduni and Persian noble houses, as the king of Armenia in 189 or 188 BC. Armenia was now regarded as a sovereign state by both Parthia and Rome. Artashes initiated his rule by conducting a survey of his land. His boundary stones, the first-ever recorded in Armenia, written in Aramaic, have been found in the area of Lake Sevan. He built a new capital city Artashat (ARTAXATA), on the left bank of the Arax River near present-day Khorvirap. This well-planned Hellenistic city remained the capital of Armenia for the next four hundred years.

The Seleucids, who were trying to regain control of Syrian coast and Mesopotamia, finally subdued the Jews in 165 BC and attacked both Parthia and Armenia at the end of Artashes reign. Artashes was defeated and captured by Antiochus IV but continued to rule in exchange for tribute. Rome, which viewed Armenia and its fellow buffer states as its allies or, more probably, potential vassals, was unhappy with the situation in Armenia, but its own domestic problems and its final campaign in Carthage left it too preoccupied to intervene in the affairs of Asia. The Seleucids, in the long run, did not manage to restore their dominance and for the next hundred years ruled only in parts of Syria. The Parthians, however, filled the power vacuum handily and, under the leadership of Mithradates I (171 – 138 BC), who was an Arsacid, became a major force, adopting both the Persian and Hellenistic culture of their predecessors. They soon

established themselves in Mesopotamia and built another capital at Ctesiphon on the Tigris River. Rome, in the meantime, was content to consolidate its position in Asia Minor and gradually extend its influence to the Euphrates River. It was just a matter of time, therefore, before the two new powers would be embroiled in a rivalry that would continue for more than three centuries.

The last century of the pre-Christian era was dominated by power struggles between Rome and Parthia, with both trying to gain control of the fragmented Seleucid territories, as well as Armenia. After destroying Carthage and carrying out a number of domestic reforms, Rome finally set its eyes, once again, on Asia. Roman authority. Seeking to secure Asia Minor, Rome gained control of Cappadocia and Commagene. In 96 BC Sulla, the Roman governor of Cilicia, and the representatives of Parthia met to partition the disputed territories in Mesopotamia into zones of influence. Roman actions in Asia, however, antagonized the leader of the pontic kingdom, Mithradates VI Eupator, a Hellenistic nobleman of Persian descent, who wished to revive the Empire of the Seleucids, and he soon embarked on a mission to liberate Asia Minor and Greece from the Romans.

## **The Cross and the Quill**

In the third decade of the century AD an event occurred, which transformed the Middle East and severed Armeno-Persian political and religious ties. Arsacid power in Parthia began to wane in the second century. Roman policy in Syria was to encourage its military governors to continually interfere in Persian politics in order to undermine the Arsacides, a strategy that was largely successful.

Trdat II had to rule in the face of this new factor in the Roman-Persian struggle for control of Armenia and Mesopotamia. Armenia cooperated with Rome during the campaigns of Emperor Severus Alexander to forestall Ardashir's expansion. By 244, however, the situation had changed drastically. The great Sassanid king, Shapur I defeated the Roman Emperor Gordian in Mesopotamia. He then made peace with Emperor Philip, who agreed not only to pay a ransom and annual tribute, but also to renounce Roman protection of Greater Armenia. 16 years later, Rome was to be humiliated further by the defeat and capture of Emperor Valerian by Shapur in Carrhae, Syria. In 252 Shapur invaded and occupied Armenia. Trdat II fled to Rome at this time, and Shapur incorporated Armenia into Persian Empire, placing his own son, Hurmazd, on the throne of Armenia. Trdat III was in Rome and he was educated in Roman customs, and he was at the court of Diocletian Emperor until 298, and Trdat backed by a Roman army, reclaimed his throne.

## **Christianity in Armenia**

One of the most crucial events in Armenian history was the conversion of Armenia to Christianity. By adopting the new religion in the fourth century, Armenia renounced its Eastern or Persian influenced past, established a distinct Christian character of its own, and, at times, became identified with the Western world.

Trdat when he returned to Armenia from Rome passing through Caesarea he met the son of Anak, who had been given the name Gregory by his Christian mentors, and, unaware of his true identity, took him into his service. After regaining Armenia, Trdat recognizing great abilities in Gregory, raised him in stature at court. Gregory, of course, had already accepted the Christian faith. Soon rumours of his parentage began to surface, spread by jealous nobles, which led to his torture and imprisonment in KHORVIRAP (deep Pit). Year passed and Trdat, like his godfather Diocletian, continued his persecution of Christians. Among the martyrs of that period were Gayane and Hripsime, two virgins who had refused Trdat's advances and were put to death. According to Agathangelos, Trdat was punished for his sins by turning into a wild boar. No one could cure him of this transformation until his sister, Khosrovidukht, had a dream in which an angel instructed her to release Gregory, who, despite long years in isolation, had, by divine intervention, survived in the pit. Gregory healed the king, who, in 301, proclaimed Christianity the sole state religion, making Armenia the first Christian state. Gregory then travelled to Caesarea to be ordained by the Greek bishop there, an action that would later have serious repercussions for the Armenian Church. Upon his return Gregory baptized the king and all the Armenian nobility, destroyed pagan temples, and in their place erected churches. At Vagharshapat, on a spot shown to him by Christ in a vision, he built the great cathedral of ETCHMIAZIN (the spot where the only begotten Son descended) upon the ruins of the temple of Anahit.

Christianity, as an underground and forbidden religion, was practiced in the Roman provinces of Palestine and Syria, particularly in the city of Edessa, from where it had spread to southern Armenia as early as the first century. Another Armenian tradition claims that a certain king, Abkar of Edessa, had asked Jesus to come to his kingdom to cure him of an illness. After the Resurrection, the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew went to Edessa to spread Christianity in Syria. Thaddeus then went to Armenia where he preached and was martyred by order of the Armenian king. It is out of this tradition that the Armenian Church claims an apostolic heritage.

Church organization followed the feudal system. The position of the Catholicos, or the Supreme Patriarch of the Church, was inherited for a time by the family of Gregory the Illuminator. Bishops were chosen from among the Nakharar families. The lower clergy was included in the Azat class and received fiefs from bishops in return for service. The bishops and priests served as judges, with the Catholicos as the supreme judge. The church became a major power in Armenia and helped to create a distinct Armenian identity. Almost a century later, the creation of the Armenian alphabet would further strengthen this sense of identity.

### **The councils of Nicea and Constantinople**

In 325 during the reign of Trdat III, the Emperor Constantine summoned the first Ecumenical Council of Christian Church to meet at Nicea in Asia Minor. Gregory's son, Aristakes, represented Armenia. The council's main objective was to define the Christian creed and to resolve the controversy between Arius and Bishop Alexander of Alexandria. Arius maintained that Christ was not of the same substance as God, hence not divine, while Alexander, and his successor Athanasius, maintained the doctrine of one substance. While the council rejected Arianism there were some bishops who were unwilling to accept all the decisions of Nicea. Keeping the bishops divided would assure the continuing power of the Emperor over the Church, and so, Constantine and number of his successors allowed the Arian debate to continue. Armenian kings followed the example of the Roman rulers and clashed repeatedly with the leaders of their own Church. It was not until 381, when the Emperor Theodosius accepted the rulings of the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, which supported Athanasianism that the Armenian and the Greek Churches finally reconciled with their monarchs.

### **The development of the Armenian Alphabet**

The most momentous event of the Arshakuni period was invention of the Armenian Alphabet. Prior to the fifth century, the Armenian used Greek for artistic and cultural expression, Latin and both version of Middle Persian (PAHLAVI) script for official communications and inscriptions, and Syriac for their liturgy. Because the majority of Armenians could not read or write, Armenia had a rich oral tradition. History was not recorded, but recited from memory and sung by various Armenian and Persian poets.

Both the crown and religious leaders of Armenia saw the partition of Armenia as an event devastating potential. Both realized the perils to Armenia under Byzantium and Persian administrative and religious control. The Armenian Church faced other problems as well. On the one hand, the influence of the Syrian

Church, whose own liturgy was used by the Armenians, was increasingly encroaching upon the authority of the Armenian Church. The ecumenical councils, on the other hand, foreshadowed the future ecclesiastical dominion of Byzantium in the region. Moreover, contrary to popular tradition, Christianity did not take hold of the entire population at once; paganism still commanded many followers and converts.

Both Catholicos Sahak and King Vramshapuh realized that in order to retain any measure of ecclesiastical and political control over a partitioned nation, the unifying factor of the Armenian language would be crucial. They asked Mesrop Mashtots, a learned scholar and clergyman, to create an alphabet, which would distinguish Armenia, linguistically and liturgically, from the powers surrounding it. Mashtots, who was born in the province of Taron, had studied Greek and Syriac, and was employed by **hazarapet** in the royal secretariat. According to his student Koriun, who wrote a biography of his master in the mid fifth century, Mashtots was well-versed in secular law and military arts before devoting himself to the religious life. He had travelled all over Armenia and fully recognized the threat of assimilation. Mashtots and a number of his students travelled, examined different alphabets, including samples of earlier attempts at an Armenian alphabet (most prominent the work of a Syrian bishop Daniel), and consulted calligraphers. Using Greek, Syriac, and letters from other scripts, Mashtots, sometime around the year 400, shaped the thirty-six letters of the Armenian Alphabet. To give the new alphabet a divine aura and make it more acceptable, legends were circulated which claimed that the alphabet, like the ten commandment, was bestowed on Mashtots in a divine vision. The miracle, however, was the alphabet itself, which represents the many distinct consonant sounds of Armenian and which has remained virtually unchanged for 1600 years. Mashtots students opened schools throughout the Armenian provinces to teach the new alphabet. Fortunately, the Sassanid monarchs during these years happened to be extremely tolerant, as was Emperor Theodosius II, who permitted Mashtots's students to run schools in Byzantine Armenia as well. According to Armenian tradition, Mashtots then went on to develop alphabets for the Georgians and the Caucasian Albanians as well.

Immediately thereafter, Armenian entered upon a period of translating Major Christian and philosophical texts into Armenian. The first work to be translated was, the Bible. The translation was made from the Syriac and Greek versions and is highly regarded by Biblical scholars. The Catholicos and king enthusiastically supported the efforts of priests and scribes to translate and copy the writing of the early Christian fathers, the canons of Church councils and various liturgical works. Armenians who had studied at Athens, Edessa, Nisibis and Antioch, and who were familiar with the works of Greek grammar, logic,



philosophy, and rhetoric, translated Porphyry, Diodochus, Probus, and other New-Platonic philosophers, among others. Aristotle was a particular favourite as demonstrated by the more than three hundred manuscripts of his works in the Armenian archives.

The translators left a legacy for western civilization as well, as a number of Syriac and Greek texts have been preserved only in their Armenian translations. Among them are: Hippolytus "Commentaries on the Benediction of Moses" the first part of the "Chronicle" of Eusebius, Timothy Aelurus the Patriarch of Alexandria "Refutation of the Definition of the council of Chalcedon", and "the Romance of Alexander the Great" by Pseudo-Callisthenes. During the high middle Ages and Renaissance, when Western Europe was "rediscovering" the literature and culture of the classical world, these Armenian translations formed an important link to the knowledge of the past.

The Armenian translators began their large output in the fifth century and continued until the second half of the seventh century, when the Arab invasions somewhat slowed their pace. Original works, including histories were written after the fall of the Arshakunis in 428.

### **Trade, Art and Architecture**

The only pre-Christian monument surviving from this period is the complex of Garni. The temple, built in the first century AD, was destroyed by an earthquake in 1679 and was restored over two decades ago. In the fifth century a number of central-domed cathedrals and domed basilicas began to appear. Few of the early churches constructed in the fourth century have survived. The mother cathedral of Armenia, Etchmiazin, although dating from this period, was totally rebuilt in the late fifth century and expanded throughout its history.

### **The Council of Ephesus**

In 431, another heresy, Nestorianism, prompted the Christian Church hierarchy to call a Third Ecumenical Council, this time at Ephesus. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, believed in the separate character of Christ's human and divine natures. Although the Council condemned Nestorianism, the debate continued and two decades later resulted in the first division of the Christian world. The Armenian religious hierarchy at Etchmiazin was still under Persian control at this time and was probably not represented at the council of Ephesus. Following Ephesus, Nestorians were welcomed in Persia as enemies of Byzantium. The Sassanid's, at times, viewed the Armenian Church as part of the Nestorian Church in Persia.

## The Council of Chalcedon

The fourth Ecumenical Council met at Chalcedon in 451. The council decreed that Christ's two natures were not separate as Nestorius claimed, or confused as Eutyches maintained, but united without confusion, change, or division. A number of Eastern Churches, the Coptic and Ethiopian among others, led by the Patriarch of Alexandria, rejected Chalcedon's Dyophysite decrees as a version of Nestorianism, and hence a heresy. They maintained that Christ had only one, divine nature. They became identified as Monophysite Churches. Christian religious leaders, realizing the seriousness of the situation, tried to find a way to reconcile the dissenting groups. In 482 they convinced Emperor Zeno to issue the Act of Union or the Henoticon. The Act recognized the religious foundations of the first three ecumenical councils as entirely sufficient. It stated that "Christ was of the same nature with the father in the Godhead and also of the same nature with us in the manhood". The terms one nature or two nature were avoided.

Although at first the compromise appeased the leaders of the Monophysite Churches, it was soon rejected by both the Monophysites and Dyophysites. The Monophysites viewed it as too vague and the Dyophysites saw it as a concession of Vardanank struggle and the battle of Avarayer, which took place in the same time of Chalcedon, did not attend the council. The canons of the council and Zeno's Henoticon only gradually arrived in Armenia, in various versions. It was only in the late fifth century, after the Persian threat had subsided, that the Armenian bishops, in 481, gathered and rejected the decision of Chalcedon. A few years later 506 in Dvin, they, along with the Georgians and Caucasian Albanians, reiterated their objections. Zeno's Henoticon was not rejected, however, and helped to maintain a dialogue between the Armenian and Greek Churches. The decision was a prudent one, as a third of Armenia was still under Byzantine administration. The Armenian Church, at the same time, insisted that it was not Monophysitic, but rather followed its own unique interpretation which viewed the two natures of Christ as indivisible. Although the humanity of Christ was not emphasized, it was not altogether ignored. Many religious experts classify the Armenian Church and Monophysite. Viewed through strict Monophysite doctrine, however, the Armenians are not true Monophysites; taking a more lenient definition, Armenians come close to holding a Monophysitic doctrine.

Was the decision to reject the Council of Chalcedon political or religious? Probably both. It is likely that the Armenian bishops, witnessing Byzantine control over western Armenia, feared that the powerful religious hierarchy at

Constantinople would eventually engulf their Church. The apostolic tradition of the Armenian Church, after all, had long been challenged by the Greeks, who claimed that since Gregory had been ordained by the Greek bishop of Caesarea, the Armenian Church was subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Persians, at the same time, were extending tolerance to Nestorians and other heretical Christian groups. By affirming both a unique doctrinal position and their apostolic tradition, the Armenians not only maintained their national Church but also appeased the Persians.

Pressure from Byzantium continued for the next few decades, however, and increased during the reign of Emperor Justinian. Armenians were finally forced to break with Constantinople. In 552 the Armenian Church adopted its own calendar and in 554, at the second council of Dvin, the Armenian Church considered a complete break from Constantinople, a decision which by 609 became official and resulted in the establishment of a totally separate Armenian Church.

## **The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia (1075-1375)**

The Cilician period, culminating in the establishment of a new Armenian kingdom in 1199, represents a unique chapter in the history of the Armenian people. For the first time the Armenians created an independent state in lands outside their historic homeland. It is also the first time that Armenians were in a region with direct access to the sea and came into close contact with the emerging nations in Western Europe and Roman Catholic Church.

Cilicia is a wide plain on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor. Surrounded by three mountain chains {Taurus to the northwest, the Anti-Taurus to the northeast and the Armanus to the east}, Cilicia offered a secure enclave, for the narrow mountain passes, most famous of which was the Cilician Gates, were easily defended against invaders. The coastline and the navigable rivers, as well as a number of trade centres made the region ideal for those Armenians who were forced to leave Armenia in the eleventh century.

### **Armenians in Cilicia**

Cilicia had been under Byzantine control since the mid-tenth century. After re-conquering it from the Arabs, the Byzantines had expelled the Muslims and had brought in Christians, especially Armenians from Lesser Armenia, to repopulate the land. Following the Byzantine and Turkish invasions of Armenia, more Armenians arrived in Cilicia, bringing their families. After the fall of the

Bagratid Kingdom, the Byzantine Empire assigned a number of Armenian military commanders to Cilicia. The Byzantine gave them the duty of protecting this corridor to the heartland of Byzantium from Turkish and Arab attacks. Having lost their own fiefs, being somewhat distant from the centre of Byzantium, and protected by mountains, a number of Armenian lords were able to achieve some level of autonomy.

Among these chieftains, two houses, the Rubenids and Hetumids, emerged as dominant forces and, by the end of the eleventh century, rivalled each other for the control of the plain. The Rubenids, who later claimed to be related to the Bagratid, challenged Byzantine authority early on and controlled the mountainous region east of the Cilician Gates, with the fortress of Vahka as their headquarters. The Rubenids soon sought to extend their control southward to the lower plain with its trade routes and ports. This aggressive policy brought them into conflict with the Hetumids. It is at this time that an event occurred which helped Rubenid ambitions, the arrival of the West European forces of the first Crusade (1096-1099).

### **The Emergence of a new Armenian Kingdom**

With the Latin states left vulnerable, Cilicia now assumed a new strategic importance, and European secular leaders requested its military and financial assistance to the crusading forces. Levon sought to use the situation to his advantage by seeking a royal crown. There is some evidence to indicate that Frederick Barbarossa had promised crown to Levon in exchange for his assistance during the Third Crusade. After some correspondence, Levon finally received a crown from Frederick's successor, the German Emperor Henry VI. He was crowned as King Levon I (LEO I) on 6 January 1199 in the Cathedral of Tarsus before the Rubenids, Hetumids, and Crusader nobility. He was anointed by the Catholicos and received the royal insignia from the papal and imperial legate, Conrad, Archbishop of Mainz. A second crown arrived from the Byzantine Emperor as a reminder that Byzantium still viewed Cilicia and its ruler as her vassals.

Levon's coronation began a crisis, which continued throughout the life of the kingdom: the question of religious unity with the Roman Catholic Church. Levon's crown came from the holy Roman Emperor and was blessed by the pope, whom Western Europe viewed as the head of Christendom. There is no evidence of Levon agreeing to the supremacy of the Roman Church prior to his coronation. After the event, however, he asked the Armenian clergy to make a minor change in the Armenian liturgy and to concede a "special respect" to the pope as the

successor of St Peter. A move towards closer ties with Rome received the support of some of the clergy, such as Bishop Nerses of Lambron, but after the latter's death in 1199, the Armenian clergy rejected any compromise. The rift was to weaken the dynasty and was exploited by both the papacy and the Crusaders.

Levon's elevation to the rank of king and his recognition by Europe put Cilicia on European maps, where it was referred to as "Little Armenia" or "Maritime Armenia". It also enabled Levon to gain the control of the Cilician plain and its ports. He broke the power of the Hetumids, established a new capital at Sis.

Following the European custom of alliances, Armenian noblewomen married into European and Byzantine noble houses. Conversion to Catholicism or the Greek Orthodox faith became common among the nobles. The rest of Armenian society did not imitate these pro-Western tendencies, however. Armenian merchants intermarried far less frequently, and the population at large, led by the Armenian Apostolic Church, was decidedly anti-Western. The Catholicos, with the aid of at least fourteen bishops, supervised the religious affairs of Cilicia, a number of Armenian monasteries were founded as well.

Levon died in 1219, leaving his only child, a daughter named Isabelle as his heir, that she was married to Philip of Antioch with the understanding that he would adopt Armenian customs and become a member of the Armenian Church. Philip, however, disdained Armenian customs and spent most of his time in Antioch. The Armenian nobility decided to end the marriage; Philip was arrested and eventually poisoned. The Hetumids regent, Constantine now arranged the marriage of Isabelle to his own son, Hetum, and the two were crowned at Sis and the Rubenide-Hetumid line was born. They reigned from 1226 to 1252. Their joint reign was commemorated in coins bearing both their images. After Isabelle's death, Hetum continued to rule until 1270, the longest rule of any Cilician king.

## **The fall of Cilician Armenia**

The brother of Hetum, Oshin, assumed the throne and convened the Church Councils at Sis in 1307 and Adana in 1316 where a number of Armenian clergy and nobles, hoping to receive military aid from Europe, agreed to conform to Roman liturgical practices and recognize the pope. The Armenian population rose against this decision, and Oshin was poisoned in 1320. His son Levon IV, who was even more strongly pro-Western, was also killed in 1341. There were now no

direct descendants of the Rubenids-Hetumids line left, and the throne passed to the Lusignans of Cyprus.

The last Cilician king Levon V, was crowned at Sis 1374. He was captured a year later by Mamelukes, who took him to Cairo from where he was ransomed by his European relatives. Levon attempted to revive the Crusader spirit in Europe, but died in France in 1393 and was buried with the kings of France in the Church of St Denis, in Paris. Ironically Levon's title of king of Armenia passed to John I of Cyprus, whose descendants then passed it on to the house of Savoy; they used the title as late as the nineteenth century. The Cilician Armenian nobility left for Byzantium, Armenia and Georgia, while Armenian merchants immigrated to France, Holland, Italy and Poland. A century later Cilicia become part of the Ottoman Empire and its Armenian towns and villages came under Turkish rule.

There are a number of reasons for the rise and fall of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. The geographical position of Cilicia, the arrival of Armenian feudal families and the temporary weakness of Byzantium permitted the rise of the Rubenids and Hetumids. The coming of the crusades gave the Armenian sufficient political, economic and strategic importance to form first, a principality and later, a kingdom. The failure of successive crusades; division among the Christian forces; the refusal of the Armenian Church to accept Roman Suzerainty; the rise of the Ayyubid and Mameluke states; contributed of the fall of the Armenian Kingdom. By the fourteen century, Europe had become involved in its own State-building. The expulsion of the Muslims out of much of Spain spelled the end of the crusading spirit, and Europe largely abandoned its interests in the Christians living in Asia. This was to have major repercussions for the West for the Ottoman Turks would soon destroy Byzantium and enter Eastern Europe, where they would remain for some four centuries.

### **The Armenian Community in Jerusalem**

One of the consequences of the rise of the Cilician Kingdom was a new prominence for the Armenian secular religious community of Jerusalem. An Armenian presence in that city can be traced back as far as the first centuries of the Christian era. By the seventh century numerous Armenian monasteries had been built there. After the break with the Greek Orthodox Church, Armenians were subject to discrimination by the city's Byzantine rulers. Following the Arab conquest in 638, control over the Christian holy places of Jerusalem became the avenue to and symbol of power for the city's Armenian and Greek communities. Although the Armenians in Jerusalem numbered fewer than the Greeks, they

enjoyed better relations with the Arabs, who saw the Byzantines as their common enemy. The Armenian Church was, therefore, initially granted custodianship of a number of important Christian shrines, although disagreements between the Greek Orthodox and the Armenian Churches over their control continued through the years. The arrival of the Crusaders improved the Armenian position considerably and enabled them to acquire a site from Georgian Church over which they build the cathedral and monastery of St James and founded the monastic order of the Brotherhood of St James became the heart of Jerusalem's Armenian community, providing accommodations for pilgrims and visiting merchants. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the St James Brotherhood refused to accept the Latinophile policies of the Catholicosate of Cilicia and proclaimed its leader to be the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem and the guardian of the Armenian-controlled Holy Places. The Armenian retained their favoured status and were exempted from the Jizya after the Muslims retook Jerusalem under Saladin. During the Mameluke period the Armenians managed to forestall attempt by the Georgian Orthodox Church to retake the site of St James, but were forced to share custodianship of parts of the Holy Sepulchre with the Georgian and Greek Churches.