THE CONQUEST OF ANTIOCH BY THE ARMENIAN KING LEVON (1216) ACCORDING TO ARAB SOURCES

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In 1208 the Seljuk Sultanate of Iconium and the Ayyubid Sultanate of Aleppo intervened with the Armenian-Antiochian treaty to be signed. In spite of that, Levon I did not refuse to dominate over Antioch and to resolve the issue of state rule heritage\textsuperscript{1} in favor of his nephew Raymond-Ruben.

The next year (1209), king Levon having no male heir of his own proclaimed Raymond-Ruben his heir. Through these efforts, Levon I attempted to unite Cilicia and Antioch into one state. However, prior to making decisive moves against Bohemond IV again, who had taken over the rule of Antioch, king Levon had to secure himself from the potentially dangerous counteractions of his Muslim neighbors by weakening their positions.

In the year 1211, the sultan of Iconium Kay Khosrow died and king Levon the Magnificent rushed in to intervene in the struggle over the throne between Kay Khosrow’s two sons. He supported the rebellious Ala al-Din against his brother Izz al-Din Kay Kawus I (1211–1219) who was the heir to the throne. Trying to seize the power Ala al-Din called for the help of Levon I promising to give him the city of Caesarea. King Levon approached Caesarea with his army, but in the end the legitimate sultan convinced him to withdraw his troops and not to intervene in the internal struggle. According to Rustam Shukurov, Ayyubid sultan Al-Malik al-Ashraf ruler of Dzajira, also had a role to play in the withdrawal of Armenian forces\textsuperscript{2}.


\textsuperscript{2} Cahen CL, La Turquie pré-ottomane (Varia Tuscica VII). Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes, Istanbul, 1988, p. 69; Шукуро Р., Образ Киликийской Армении в Анатолийских мусульманских источниках (XIII – начало XIV в.), Чфліййій європейського похиломовини міжнародного підходу (ідемідійським відкриттям нав-
During this period, the internal political struggle continued in Antioch. Bohemond IV was using all possible measures in order to get rid of his rivals. In 1208, he imprisoned one of his main adversaries, the Latin patriarch of Antioch Peter of Angulem, and this resulted in worsening relations with Rome. Meanwhile, Bohemond was unable to dispose of the opposing forces, which continued to support Raymond-Ruben, and the Armenian King benefited from this situation.

In 1216, a colophon writer of a manuscript asserts, “...in that year by God’s grace, the victorious Armenian king Levon took over the large Syrian capital.” Regardless, Sembat the Constable provided the most detailed description of the conquest of the city. On February 16, 1216, as Sembat the Constable eloquently put, Levon the Magnificent took over Antioch in a “skilfull and wise” manner and gave the throne to Raymond-Ruben for a much longer period. Sembat continues, that Levon I was able to win over some of the nobles of Antioch (including seneschal Amori) by promising them large rewards.

The nobles opened the doors of the city at night and let the Armenian army in. The majority of the Francs fortified themselves in the citadel of Antioch but were soon forced to surrender. The patriarch of Antioch, along with the nobles of the city and headed by king Levon enthroned Raymond-Ruben (1216–1219). Considering the desertion of seneschal Amori and other Francs who opened the gates of Antioch to the Armenian army, Hethum of Korykos writes: “The Armenian king Levon I seized Antioch at night through deception and enthroned his brother’s grandson Ruben”.

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5 Մարտիրոս Սարգսյան, Սարգսյան, աշխատակազմակերպման է. Սարգսյան, Ագարակ, 1956, էջ 219;
6 Ibidem.
7 Սարգսյան Վ., Հայոց պատմություն. Բժշկագիտական, գրականագիտական, մշակութային տեղեկագիր գրքեր, Երևան, 2011, էջ 50, as well as Սարգսյան, Սարգսյան, աշխատակազմակերպման է. Երևան, 1951, էջ 79, 94 and Ibid, vol. 2, 1956, p. 63: While one of the continuations of Samwel Anetsu erroneously put the capture of Antioch at the year
Meanwhile, one of the followers of Samuel Anetsi, mistakenly cited 1218 as the year that Antioch was conquered.

The following are the assertions of the Arab authors who mention the conquest of Antioch. The Historian Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, who in 1216 was sent by Ayyubid Al-Malik al-Ashraf, ruler of Khilat, as an ambassador to Aleppo to his brother sultan Al-Malik al-Zahir, asserts that it was him who told al-Zahir about the conquest of Antioch. Sibt writes, “That year (612 year of Hijra) on Sunday, the 24th of Shawwāl (February 24, 1216), Lavin took over Antioch from the Franks”.

Sibt does not mention the motivation behind Levon’s action. Contrary to that, Izz al-Din ibn Shaddad is well informed about the details of the succession to the Antioch throne, even though he mistakenly dates Levon’s endeavors to take place in the late 1215:

“One Monday, 23rd of Shaaban, 612 (December 17, 1215), Ibn Lavun attacked Antioch, conquered it and passed it on to his nephew (sic)”. This was due to the fact that the father of the ruler prince Raymond Senior had two sons. One of them was the afore-mentioned Baymund (Bohemond IV) who ruled there, the other one was named Raymond. Their father preferred the latter, thus he engaged him with Ibn Lavin’s daughter and later had them married. Then, he awarded the throne to him and made the people acknowledge him as his heir. However, it came to be that Raymond died of rabies while his father was still alive. He had had a son from the sister (sic) of Ibn Lavin, who was named Rubin (Ruben). Ibn Lavin headed to Antioch taking along his sister (sic) and her son”.

Izz al-Din ibn Shaddad explains that Bohemond killed the Patriarch of Antioch as the latter was openly supporting Levon and agreed that the throne had to be inherited by Raymond-Ruben. He continues: “Ibn Lavun had received the letter of the Patriarch of Antioch (in the original text - biṭrīq Anṭākya) reading that the

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9 Refers to King Levon I.

10 Refers to Alice (Alits), who was not the sister of Levon, but his cousin: his brother Ruben’s daughter.

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*kingdom* belonged to his nephew. The same letter had been sent to him (Bohemond) and when he received it and read it he said: This is My kingdom and it is in my hands. Then he took the Patriarch into the Citadel and killed him.\(^\text{12}\)

Ibn Shaddad’s contemporary Syrian historian Bar Hebraeus has understood the inheritance issues of Antioch better. “At that time, he writes, when Prince Baymund (Bohemond III) died, he left one son named Rufin (Ruben). And although the throne was his by right, his uncle dared to oppose and take it over for himself. After this, Levon, the Armenian king, based on the fact that Rufin the Franc was the son of his brother’s daughter, got infuriated and came to Antioch forcing the people of Antioch to swear allegiance to him.”\(^\text{13}\)

Levon was benevolent towards the city population, which was the guarantee for his success. In this regard, another Arab historian’s, IbnWasil’s statements are noteworthy: “On year’s (612 of Hijra) Shawwāl month (January-February, 1216) the Armenian king, “Ibn Levon”, conquered Antioch and was good towards the local population, applying justice. The ruler of Antioch Brins (Prince)\(^\text{14}\) was a tyrant and Ibn Levon’s reputation increased among the people.”\(^\text{15}\)

The conquest of Antioch was the most significant achievement of Levon the Magnificent. It was also a great diplomatic victory. First of all the conquest of Antioch was timed correctly. The Fifth Crusade (1213–1221)\(^\text{16}\) had started and regardless of its strength and success it forced the Ayyubids to concentrate their troops in its direction. Accordingly there could be some hope that the Aleppo authorities might not be so willing to support Bohemond IV. Nevertheless Levon was much more prudent this time and when he took Antioch he immediately sent the moslem captives to Aleppo, preventing the possible intervention of al-Malik al-Zahir. …and he (Levon) liberated a group of moslem captives who were in Antioch and transferred them to [Aleppo], and there was a truce between him and

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\(^{12}\) Ibidem.

\(^{13}\) The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus Gregory Abu-l-Faraj. Translated by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, Amsterdam, 1976, p. 370.

\(^{14}\) Refers to Bohemond IV One-eyed.


al-Malik al-Zahir”\textsuperscript{17}. Izz al-Din Ibn Shaddad who also describes the circumstances of the seizure of Antioch has written: “When Ibn Lavun took the citadel and Baymund (Bohemond) returned to Tripoli, Ibn Lavun wrote a letter to al-Malik al-Zahir Abu al-Fath Baybars informing that he is in his service and he will [never] oppose to his instruction and opinion and that he had conquered Antioch just in his (al-Malik al-Zahir’s) name and had liberated moslem captives held there and had sent them to Aleppo”\textsuperscript{18}. This undertaking of Levon as well as his long-term cooperation with Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, restrained the sultan of Aleppo and prevented the intervention of his troops. It was proved by the events following it.

After the seizure of Antioch Levon the Magnificent rather improved his relations with the Catholic Church restoring the catholic Episcopal sees of Tarsus and Mamistra, as well as the fortress of Baghras which was given back to the Templars\textsuperscript{19}. On this occasion Ibn Wasil is informing: “Ibn Lavun gave Baghras to the Templars (in the original text – Dāwiyya), nominated his nephew as his deputy in Antioch and turned to his country having fear of Izz al-Din Kay Kawus”\textsuperscript{20}. This was the apogee of the flexible diplomacy by the Cilician Armenia.

According to the Arab historians the Seljuk sultan of Iconium Kay Kawus was the first to react after the seizure of Antioch and Bohemond IV’s call for help. Ibn Wasil putting the event at the year 612 of Hijra is informing how the seljuks of Rum captured the fortress of Lulu belonging to the Cilician Armenia. Most probably this very news made Levon leave Antioch and return to Cilicia in a hurry. Meanwhile the sultan of Rum continued devastating the country of Armenians capturing some other fortresses. According to one of the successors of Samuel of Ani: “[the sultan] came with a big army against king Levon and surrounded the fortress of Kapan, and king Levon gave a battle with his warriors, at first he was victorious, but then the troops stupidly lost the battle against the sultan”\textsuperscript{21}.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibn Wāṣil, Mufrārīg al-kurūb, vol. III, p. 233. See also: Cahen Cl., La Syrie du Nord, p. 621.
\textsuperscript{18} Izz al-Din Ibn Šaddād, al-A lāq al-ḥāṭira, vol. 1.2, p. 408–409:
\textsuperscript{20} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{21} Մակատար Մանուշեն և Հայաստան, հեղ. 238.
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It comes clear from a colophon written in a Gospel made in Tarsus (1216) that the Armenian troops didn’t organize a serious resistance in the battle near the fortress of Kapan. Even some princes were captured by the enemy, including Constantin the Constable: “The regiment of infidels reached the place devastating the boundaries as much as they could. And our God-loving King sent his nephew Constantin the Constable with limited warriors in order to prevent the destruction of our boundaries”. And then he adds “and many of them were captured and taken to their country, they captured Constantin the Constable as well and also two princes who were with him – Kersak (Kir Sahak) and the other Constantin – son of Hethum Sevastos”\(^{22}\).

Nevertheless the news about the fall of Antioch put the Aleppo sultan al-Malik al-Zahir in a stalemate situation. According to Ibn Wasil, in the month of Muharram of 613 of Hijra (April-May 1216) Kay Kawus made an appeal to al-Malik al-Zahir, suggesting to organize a joint attack and liberate Antioch of king Levon. As a response to that initiative Al-Malik al-Zahir suggested the following plan: the seljuks of Iconium attack the Armenian Kingdom from the Marash direction, he himself (Al-Malik al-Zahir) from Darbsak, and Prince (Bohemond IV) will aim directly at Antioch having under his command the troops of Damascus, Hama and Homs\(^{23}\).

The historian from Aleppo Kamal al-Din Ibn al-Adim presents the deeds in a somewhat different way. According to him, in 1216 correspondence was established between the sultan al-Malik al-Zahir and the sultan Izz al-Din Kay Kawus. “They came to terms that the sultan (al-Malik al-Zahir) goes under his (Kay Kawus’s) patronage and signs a truce, as he was afraid of his uncle. Kay Kawus agreed with that”\(^{24}\). The historian adds that sultan of Aleppo after all was sorry for what he had done and sent a mission to Cairo to receive the consent of Al-Malik al-Adil on his plans. At the same time he had no illusions about support

\(^{22}\) Հարեդամ Հայկացու հիշատակագրություն, էջ 101; Անդրանիկ Աղթան, Հայաստանի դիրքագրություն, էջ 238; Արամ Աղաբյուրյան, Սուրբ-ընտ, էջ 221-222: Levon freed the mentioned prisoners from captivity and only three years later as a ransom ceded the fortresses Luluia and Lozat to the Sultanate of Rum. See: Ibidem, p. 222.

\(^{23}\) Իբն Վասիլ, Մուֆարիջ ալ-քումի, թիվ III, էջ 234.

of al-Malik al-Adi, for, according to Ibn al-Adim, “he (al-Malik al-Zahir) sent an ambassador to Egypt. The sultan prepared post-horses to get fresh news of his uncle (al-Malik al-Adil), in order to know what to do if he noticed any doubtful step on his side. And he in his turn addressed personally to Kay Kawus. And in all those events his objective was to keep the army in the state of alert to be ready to receive Kay Kawus and join him first of all to [attack] the country of “Ibn Levon”. Antioch was possessed by “Ibn Levon” and the sultan got in a deadlock situation, as he was on the borders of it, but he knew that [Levon] was under the patronage of his uncle (al-Adil)”\(^25\).

Ibn Wasil’s information is quite notable, for it reveals the contradictions between al-Adil and al-Zahir, as well as the role of the Egyptian sultan Ayyubid in keeping Aleppo away from the sultanate of Iconium consequently not allowing him to attack Cilicia. The historian reports that “Al-Malik al-Zahir sent a man to al-Malik al-Adil to get his advice on this matter\(^26\), but al-Adil refused his point of view and said that he did not even want to see him (al-Malik al-Zahir). He also informed what kind of intrigues this issue could have. [After that] al-Malik al-Zahir found himself in a great confusion – not to hold the promise given to Izz al-Din, or to oppose his uncle al-Malik al-Adil”\(^27\).

The reports on 2016 prove that links existed between Levon I and al-Malik al-Adil. Based on the reports by Arab historians one can conclude that the cooperation between Levon I and al-Malik al-Adil was ongoing in 1208–1216 and the following years.

Although we are not aware of the details of the letters, we can assume that Levon I formally recognized the supremacy of the Egyptian sultan. It didn’t mean that he had any liability towards al-Malik al-Adil, as his sultanate had no borders with the Cilician Armenia. Levon I was well informed about the internal contradictions in the Ayyubid family and was cooperating with al-Adil trying to hold back his nephew from neutralizing the key member of the anticilician coalition.

In this particular case the Ayyubids of Aleppo preferred not to attack Cilicia, as not only they didn’t receive Egyptian support but could fill the senior sultan

\(^{26}\) Refers to the joint attack of Iconium and Tripoli on Cilician Armenia and Antioch.
with anger for initiating a war against a close monarch. In order to definitively prevent the possible attack of the sultanate of Aleppo Levon I surprised al-Malik al-Zahir by sending him a letter right after his correspondence with al-Malik al-Adil.

The brief content of the letter is reported by Ibn Wasi. Levon I expresses his friendship and even fidelity to Ayyubids with the following expressions: “I am the sultan’s servant (in original text mamlük (slave)), a shoot of his state. I have approached him as an Arab and I ask to save me from this deadlock situation (in the original text - al-warta) and I am his servant to my death”. Applying skilful diplomacy Levon reminds al-Malik al-Zahir that twice when the sultan had sent his troops to capture Damascus he could easily penetrate the Aleppo sultanate and could cause large devastations, but he preferred not to do so thus serving the Ayyubids. Then king Levon admits that his services are much more important than that of Bohemond IV with whom al-Zahir is in an alliance. Finally the Armenian king considers his duty to add that he has instructed Raymond-Ruben nominated as his deputy in Antioch to be loyal to the Ayyubids. According to the historian, along with the letter Levon sent a magnificent gift that gained al-Malik al-Zahir’s confidence.

This report of Ibn Wasi is exceptional and contributes considerably to a complete analysis of relations between the Cilician Armenia and the Ayyubids. The Arab historian continues informing that during the mentioned period the ambassadors of the sultan of Iconium were coming to Aleppo to persuade al-Malik al-Zahir to give instructions to the troops to attack the Cilician Armenia. But the latter sent back the Seljuk ambassadors and refused to fulfill his promise. Thus, the danger to the Cilician Armenia was mainly neutralized and Levon’s task was to struggle only against the seljuks of Rum.

The above-mentioned reports of Ibn al-Adim and Ibn Wasi prove that after 1208 Levon I maintained close relations with the Ayyubid sultan of Egypt, and eight years after that, these relations played an important role in the East Mediterranean political situation. Taking into consideration the political weight of Al-Malik al-Adil in the Middle East and the fact that the latter couldn’t be

30 Ibidem, p. 236.
interested in the creation of a Cilician-Antioch joint kingdom. King Levon has to
be commended for his key role in establishing the above-mentioned collaboration
as a significant achievement of his diplomacy.
ВЗЯТИЕ АНТИОХИИ ЦАРЕМ ЛЕВОНОМ (1216 г.)
СОГЛАСНО АРАБСКИМ ИСТОЧНИКАМ

ТЕР-ГЕВОНДЯН В.

Резюме

Царь Левон I около пятнадцати лет последовательно защищал законные права своего внучатого племянника Раймонда-Рубена с целью возведения последнего на престол Антиохии. В 1216 г. попытки царя увенчались успехом, и он наконец завладел Антиохией. Учитывая опыт предыдущих лет, армянский царь на этот раз сделал все, чтобы не допустить создания коалиции соседних стран против Киликии. С этой целью он предпринял серьезные дипломатические шаги, в результате которых Айюбидский султанат Алеппо воздержался от предложенного султаном Иконии совместного нападения на Килийскую Армению.

Дiplоматические действия армянского царства нашли отражение в письмах царя Левона, адресованных Айюбидскому султану Египта ал-Малик ал-Адилу и его племяннику Айюбидскому султану Алеппо ал-Малик ал-Захиру, важные сведения о которых передают арабские летописцы XIII века Камаль ал-Дин Ибн ал-Адим и Ибн Васил.