

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Isaac Comnenus, 'Emperor of Cyprus' and his Daughter

I refer to Mr G Lauder-Frost's letter [*Foundations* (2004) 1(4): 301] on the subject of Isaac Comnenus and his daughter.

First of all, Isaac was not an 'Emperor of Cyprus' but he did proclaim himself 'Emperor of the Orient' based in Cyprus, perhaps having ambitions sometime to take the imperial throne in Constantinople. Secondly, Isaac was not a Komnenos by male descent but a son of the Pansebastos Andronic Doukas Kamateros by Eiréné Komnénéa, daughter of the Sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos (from whom the grandson took his name) by Teodora Dyplosynadéné. (Her name suggests that both father and mother belonged to the mighty Synadenos clan.)

An authoritative study on Isaac and his daughter by the late Count WH Rüdtt-Collenberg was published in *Byzantion* (Vol 38 (1968), pp.123-179; Brussels). He showed (p.138) that Isaac made clear his imperial pretensions in 1184. These came to nothing and he was captured by Richard I, Lionheart, King of England, in 1191. Cyprus passed to the Lusignan dynasty and Isaac fled to Constantinople, where he was poisoned in 1195. The unfortunate 'Emperor' married twice. The first marriage, to an Armenian princess, took place in 1175 or 1176, prior to the battle of Myriokephalon, 17th September 1176. Her first name is unknown but she was the daughter of Thoros II, 'Lord of the Mountains' (1145-1169) by Isabel of Courtenay-Edessa, a member of a famous crusader family. Isaac's second wife, whom he married in 1185/86, was a natural daughter of William I de Hauteville, King of Sicily (1154-1166) but, again, we do not know her first name. The 'Emperor' had issue from his first marriage only: a son who soon disappeared from history, and a surviving daughter and heir. The Western chronicles do not record her first name (probably Armenian reflecting her maternal ancestry), designating her simply as the *Damsel de Chypre*, the 'Young Lady of Cyprus'.

The *Damsel de Chypre* was born in 1177 or 1178. After her father's capture, King Richard entrusted her protection to his own sister, Joanna of England. Joanna was the widow of William II of Sicily (d.1189) and had remarried, in October 1196, to become the third wife of Raymond VI Count of Toulouse. The Damsel stayed with Joanna until

she was in her early 20s; Joanna died on 24th September 1199. Raymond VI then married the *Damsel*, in 1200, as his fourth wife. Thus, Fenwick's statement, cited by Mr. Lauder-Frost as erroneous, was, in fact, correct. This marriage did not last, however, and Raymond divorced the *Damsel* in 1202, perhaps on the grounds that she was of the orthodox faith. The Count of Toulouse married for a fifth time, on 11th January 1204, Leonor of Aragon, a politically more important matrimonial match. The *Damsel* also remarried in 1204, in the port of Marseilles, where warriors were gathering to embark on the Fourth Crusade. She apparently wanted to return to her home country, maybe with some hope to regain her inheritance, and this was a good opportunity.

The *Damsel's* second husband, Thierry, was not a simple 'Flemish knight' as suggested by Mr. Lauder-Frost, but a natural son and apparently the only offspring of Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders, who had died 1191 during the Third Crusade. Thierry then joined the Fourth Crusade, but sailed directly to the Holy Land, thus avoiding the scandalous conquest of Zara (*Zadar*) and plundering of Constantinople. The evidence indicates that Thierry and the *Damsel* were overseas until 1207, the last time that the records mention the couple.

Now, supposing that Thierry died in battle or in an epidemic, the *Damsel*, a widow then aged only about 30, might have remarried again. She may have taken as her third husband the English Crusader, Sir Miles de Stapleton but we need to find evidence to support this assertion. Mr Lauder-Frost does not mention when Sir Miles returned to England. If it was before 1207, that militates against the suggested hypothesis.

The above account is based on Rüd't-Collenberg's well-documented studies. Let me now complement these with some information from my own research on 'Emperor' Isaac's pedigree. As already mentioned, he was the son of the Pansebastos Andronic Doukas Kamateros by Eiréné Komnéna. His paternal grand-parents were the Protonotarios Gregorios Kamateros and Eiréné Doukaina. On his maternal side, his grandfather was the Sebastocrator Isaac Komnenos, a younger brother of the Emperor Manuel I the Great (d.1180). So, although not a Komnenos by male descent, Isaac was related to several of the most prominent Byzantine families.

I cannot therefore confirm whether or not Sir Miles de Stapleton can be integrated into this genealogical patchwork, but I hope that this additional information will be of use to Mr Lauder-Frost in his research on this topic.

Prof. Szabolcs de Vajay
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Lindsay Brook comments:

I have so far failed to find any evidence that a late twelfth century Sir Miles de Stapleton existed. Thirteenth and mid-14th century Stapletons called Miles, from Stapleton-on-Tees, North Riding of Yorkshire, indubitably existed (CP 12(1):262 & 264). However there was another Stapleton family in the West Riding of Yorkshire (parish of Darrington, Wapentake of Osgoldcross) which may well yield another crusader candidate, Sir Miles, alleged husband of the 'Damsel of Cyprus'. I would support Prof de Vajay's and Mr Lauder-Frost's call for any elucidation on these points.

Popes and Pornocrats Briefly Revisited

The Foundation has been fortunate over the past year or so to acquire some works from the library of the late Professor-Doctor Adolf Hofmeister, a distinguished German historian with a keen interest in genealogy. The latest is: Gerstenberg, Otto (1933). *Die politische Entwicklung des römischen Adels im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert*. 1 Teil. [Inaugural-Dissertation.] Berlin. (An English translation of the title is '*The Political Development of the Roman Nobility in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*'.)

There is a useful genealogy of '*Die Familie des Theophylact*' on page 56. This work, until now inaccessible to me, should be added to the list of references listed in my article [*Foundations* (January 2003) 1 (1): 5-21]. The dissertation cites some works that, had I known about them, I would have consulted. From an early study of Gerstenberg's work, I have no reason to revise the genealogies that I presented in my earlier article.

Members and Users of the FMG may now order copies of selected pages from this rather rare work (see our website for details of how to order, or write to the editor).

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Bohémond de Brienne

I should like to thank Jean-François Vannier for his observations on my article [*Foundations* (January 2004) 1(4): 200-207]. In genealogy, as in other disciplines, it is always wise to look for the most obvious solution to a difficult problem, rather than more obscure ones¹. In reminding the reader that double forenames were not uncommon in medieval Europe, Professor Vannier has provided a very plausible identity for the uniquely-named Bohémond de Brienne. To my knowledge, the only other members of the nobility of the Latin East called Bohémond were descendants of the de Hautevilles of Southern Italy and Sicily, later Princes of Antioch, and a few of *their* descendants. Moreover the dates fit well.

Professor Vannier invites us to search for an Agnès in the Brienne genealogy. I turned first to Arbois de Jubainville², but no Agnès (apart from the wife of Érard II de Brienne) appear until 1297 when she married Jean Count of Joigny. Searches through several secondary sources, citing original documents, failed to yield anything further.

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¹ A similar piece of advice was given to me by David Kelly: "*The population of Europe in the early middle ages was very much smaller than it is today. Where there are two individuals (male or female) with about the same dates, in about the same social hierarchy and living geographically close, first investigate the possibility that they are they are one and the same person.*"

² Arbois de Jubainville, Henri d' (1972). *Catalogue d'Actes des Comtes des Brienne, 950-1356. Bibliothèque de l'école des Chartes*: 23: 141-186.