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An Unknown Portrait of King of Cyprus Hugh IV
Lusignan: Reconstructions, Questions and Hypotheses
Regarding a Miniature from the Manuscript
BSB. Clm. 10268. Michael Scotus. F. 1r.¹

ABSTRACT

The Lusignan epoch in Cyprus produced a number of interesting and extraordinary individuals, of which king Hugh IV Lusignan particularly stood out. However, due to a lack of portraits left to us from that time, we have only a very vague concept of what those individuals' appearances looked like. This work makes a unique attempt at reconstructing a portrait of king Hugh IV Lusignan based on a miniature found in a manuscript containing works of Michael Scotus, located in the Bavarian State Library.

KEYWORDS: Cyprus, kings, art, portraits, manuscripts, heraldry, reconstruction

STRESZCZENIE

Nieznany portret króla cypryjskiego Hugona IV Lusignan: Rekonstrukcje, pytania i hipotezy wokół miniatury z manuskryptu BSB. Clm. 10268. Michael scotus. F. 1r.

Era dynastii Lusignan na Cyprze zrodziła wiele ciekawych i niezwykłych postaci, spośród których wyróżnia się szczególnie król Hugon IV Lusignan. Ponieważ nie przetrwały żadne portrety z tego okresu, posiadamy jedynie mgliste wyobrażenie o tym, jak mogły wyglądać te postaci. Niniejsza praca

1 I thank my daughter and artist A. Bliznyuk for her help in the reconstruction of the portrait, as well as for numerous observations and notes used in the article.

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ma na celu próbę unikalnej rekonstrukcji portretu króla Hugona IV Lusignan na podstawie miniatury znajdującej się w manuskrypcie zawierającym dzieła Michaela Scotusa, przechowywanym w Bawarskiej Bibliotece Landowej.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Cypr, królowie, sztuka, portrety, manuskrypty, heraldyka, rekonstrukcja

The Lusignan epoch in Cyprus left us many magnificent architectural monuments, stunning art of religious significance, coins, and icons. However, we know almost nothing about secular art from this time period. This by no means indicates a lack of interest in art among Cypriot nobility, or that the said nobility did not commission artists to paint, among other things, their own portraits. Pictures of the last queen of Cyprus Catherine Cornaro, although not always painted during her lifetime, are well-known to us. However, those portraits were made not in Cyprus, but in Italy. Somewhat less known are a depiction of Jean II Lusignan (1432–1458) from a manuscript from Stuttgart painted by a German 15th century traveler Georg von Echingen (Württembergische Landesbibliothek), as well as a depiction of Pierre I Lusignan (1359–1369) on a mural in the Florentine church Santa Maria Nuova (Bliznyuk, 2016, pl. V. 16. 1, 2), the likeness of king Janus Lusignan (1398–1432) and his wife Charlotte de Bourbon on a mural located in the royal chapel of St. Catherine in Pyrga in Cyprus, and the portrait of queen Charlotte Lusignan (1458–1464), kept in the State archive in Turin (Archivio di Stato di Torino). But all these pictures date back to the second half of the 14th–15th centuries, that is, to the time of the origin and development of the Renaissance culture in Italy.

Medieval art did not have portraits of individuals in the understanding of the Renaissance. Medieval artists did not strive for realism, did not seek the similarity of image and the original. Any medieval image was schematic, spiritualistic and frequently stereotypical and in accordance with iconographical tradition. If we speak about the kings' images, a medieval artist usually depicted the power, an ideal of the power or an ideal governor, rather than the king's actual portrait. Nevertheless, based on the verbal and visual historical sources, we try to understand and imagine a man of the past: not only how he lived, what he thought about, his emotional state and mentality, but also how he looked despite the symbolism of the medieval art.

The only way for us to form an idea of the likeness of the kings from the Lusignan dynasty in the 13th–first half of the 14th centuries is through schematic depictions on coins and seals. Thus, findings from other sources become all the more valuable.

An illustrious manuscript is currently located in the Bavarian State Library. It consists of works on astronomy written by Michael Scotus, emperor Friedrich II Hohenstaufen's astrologist (BSB. Clm. 10268). The manuscript was presumably written in Padua in the 1320es (Voskoboynikov, 2008, p. 323) or 1340es (Haffner, 1997, p. 102). U. Bauer (1983), who studied it while working on her dissertation, prefers a more careful interpretation of its conception and proposes that it was written in the middle of the 14th century (pp. 1, 8, 14). The manuscript had been either commissioned by the king of Cyprus Hugh IV Lusignan, or gifted him. In the middle of the manuscript's first page, between two columns of text, the coat of arms of the Lusignan dynasty had been placed (Picture 1). This proves that the manuscript was directly intended for the royal house of the Lusignan, was made due a certain date, and, subsequently, sent to Cyprus. At a later date, after the marriage between Anna, daughter of Cypriot king Janus (1398–1432), and Duke of Savoy Louis, son of Amedeus VIII of Savoy, this manuscript together with other handwritten books (Bouvier, 2007; Grivaud, 2009, p. 54–55; Grivaud, 2013, p. 234; Hoppin, 1957) was given her as a part of a dowry when she was to leave Cyprus. Accordingly, the manuscript has been taken to Europe and ended up in the library of the house of Savoy. Then Michael Scotus' works ended up on Sardinia—again as a result of marriage and inheritance. Subsequently, both emblems of the Cypriot Lusignan coat of arms were added to the coat of arms of Duke of Savoy Amedeus II, who became king of Sardinia in the year 1720 (Siebmacher, 1857): namely, a standing red lion with a crown on the background of six blue and silver alternating stripes, and a golden Jerusalem cross on a silver background. During the times of the Wittelsbach, the codex may have ended up in Mannheim as a result of ties between Bavaria, Pfalz and Sardinia, where it was rewritten at the beginning of the 18th century, however, this time losing the depiction of the Lusignan coat of arms and the rich decorum, by which the original was marked (BSB Clm. lat. 10663). The library of Mannheim eventually handed down both manuscripts to Munich's library (Bauer, 1983, p. 31).

We risk assuming, that the earliest, most unique, and to this day unknown or unheeded by the scholars portrait of a Cypriot king Hugh IV Lusignan and, likely, the only artistic portrait of king was painted at the first page of the manuscript BSB. Clm. 10268. Noticeable damages in the manuscript and the utterly uncharacteristic depiction of a human face in combination with state and family coat of arms simultaneously haven't allowed researchers to entertain the idea of a possible portrait having been placed in the manuscript, and—either because of tradition or inertia—it was assumed that a knight's helmet adorned with a crown was, as is supposed to be in heraldry, an addition to the Lusignan coat of arms.



Picture I. BSB. Clm. 10268. Michael Scotus. F. 1r. Padua. Middle of the 14th c.

Alternatively, it has even been proposed that the crowned and faceless figure in the manuscript is, in fact, a shield holder (Bauer, 1983, p. 29). However, never before has it occurred to identify it as a real historical figure. Meanwhile, a careful inspection of the miniature and, most importantly, of its fragment, in our opinion, despite the significant damage, inarguably reveals features of a human face. The drawing can be characterized as a bust portrait of an elderly person with a beard, long, shoulder-long hair, a narrow, long face with a broad nose and eyes that are widely set apart, as well as a small mouth with somewhat plump and pressed together lips, and with a big forehead. On the head we see a golden Lusignan crown. The figure is enveloped in a purple cloak. Purple and gold can, on one hand, be interpreted as heraldic symbols of royalty. On the other hand—those are the colors of Byzantine emperors and may have been used in order to underline the ties between the Cypriot culture and the Byzantine civilization. This impression of a peculiar cultural interaction was typical

for the Lusignan, at least, starting with the reign of Hugh IV. With time, it will only grow and evolve. At the same time, the cloak seen in the miniature is not a heraldic cloak per se since it does not cover the coat of arms, is not framing it or forming a kind of tent, nor does it look like a lambrequin, which is normally attached to the heraldic shield. Only the human figure is dressed in the cloak. While the crown can be interpreted as a typical heraldic crest placed on top of the cloak—seeing as there is a clear red line visible underneath the crown—no other feature of the figure resembles a traditional heraldic helmet. In this case, the artist did not follow established heraldic traditions. We can argue about the intentions behind such a choice. Yet it is obvious that the artist depicted the upper part, which is supposed to be part of the cloak and be adorned by a crown but in our case holds more semblance to a type of “headwear,” intentionally: the fragment of the miniature holds no clues indicating a once present connection between the cloak and the red tint underneath the crown.

Depictions of humans, in on themselves, are not forbidden in heraldry. However, no other Lusignan coat of arms similar to the present one found in the Bavarian manuscript is known to us. Obvious facial features and the big combined coat of arms so uncharacteristic of the Lusignan have allowed us to bring forward the hypothesis that this is the first artistic portrait of king Hugh IV, made with artistic liberties. This cannot be a portrait that has been made using a real-life reference. It is unlikely that the artist has personally seen the Cypriot monarch, since the king has never left his own kingdom, and has probably only used other existing depictions or descriptions. If we allow ourselves to entertain the idea that the depicted individual is, indeed, king Hugh IV Lusignan, his age, by implication, makes us reconsider the assumed date of emergence of the discussed manuscript which is usually argued to be the 1320es. It seems more likely that it has been painted at the end of the Cypriot monarch’s reign, i.e. in the middle of the 14th century, around the 1350es. Of course, the damage to the manuscript allows us to make out only vague features of the depicted individual and forces us to use our own imagination to complete the likeness. Still, there is no doubt that this is a likeness of a human, a crowned person. Who, is it if not Hugh IV Lusignan, the owner of the manuscript? Who, if not the king himself—the “enlightened” monarch, surrounded by educated people, whose unfeigned interest in culture was known far away from Cyprus, whose wisdom was a source of awe for the Byzantine intellectual Nicephore Gregoras (Leone, 1981; *Nicephori Gregorae...*, 1855, vol. 3, p. 29), to whom the great Italian humanist Giovanni Bocaccio dedicated his timeless creation “Genealogy of the gentile gods,” whose court became the first in “the world of beauty” and was an example of a perfect creation (Boustron, 1886, p. 258)—the king-maecenas

and an admirer of art could inspire an artist, the decorator of this manuscript? Many centuries later, people still reminisced about the friendship between Giovanni Boccaccio and Hugh IV. At the beginning of the 16th century, Antonio Colbertaldo, who at that time was in the circle of the last Cypriot queen Caterina Cornaro, writes about it in awe: “This king was such a close friend to brilliant people, and above all to Giovanni Boccaccio who dedicated to him the book “The genealogy of the gentile gods”... a sensible senior of unmatched wit and worthy of praise as a successful king” (“Questo fu il re tanto amico de virtuosi e specialmente de Giovanni Boccaccio il quale gl’indirizzò il libro della Genealogia de i dei e fu, come ne dice l’istesso nel principio di detta opera, avveduto signore e di benigno ingegno et lodevole per la felicità reale...”) (Perocco, 2012, p. 92).

Not less famous are the impeccable objects of both oriental and western origin, which have been commissioned by this king. For instance, basins made by Damask craftsmen and now kept in Louvre (Enlart, 1899, vol. II, 2 pls; Rice, 1956; Riterfeld, 2014; Weyl Carr, 2005; Weyl Carr, 2008), or the famous watch, made by a renowned Venetian jeweler Mondino da Cremona that stunned people of its time with its elegance (*horologium... articialiter fabricatum*), as well as with its price—800 gold ducats. This purchase received its own entry in the documents of the Venetian Senate in the year 1334. It outright stated that this was an order made by the king, and that it was delivered to him (Venezia – Senato, 2013, doc. 749, p. 325; Lazari, 1859, p. 180). In sum, the court of Hugh IV Lusignan was one of the cultural centers of Levant, a center of gravity for the intellectual elite for Western Europe, Byzantium and the East alike, a place where early humanistic ideas of the 14th century found fertile soil (Bliznyuk, 2005; Bliznyuk, 2014, p. 58–80; Bliznyuk, 2013; Bliznyuk, 2016, p. 649–663; Schabel, 2004, p. 127–129; Schabel, 1998; Nicolaou-Konnari & Schabel, 2005, p. 233–234, 272–275). Hugh IV Lusignan became a Latin crusader king of a new type and combined in his image the traditional glory of a knight and piety of a crusader with wisdom, education, and talent of a new age ruler. It is, however, important to understand that the basins, the watch, and the manuscript with the works of Michael Scotus and, most likely, many other luxurious and exquisite objects in the royal palace were meant to demonstrate to the whole world that the Kingdom of Cyprus was a strong, independent, mature and rich state. In order to achieve this goal, Hugh IV, on one hand, adopted the courteous language of Europe and, on the other hand—the Byzantine language of art (Weyl Carr, 2008, p. 314). Hugh IV was, probably, the first among the Lusignan, who understood a potential of the visual art in the representation of the power, of its effectiveness, strength and wealth.

Nonetheless, one may argue that all of this is just our emotions speaking. The question is: is it possible to prove that the man on the miniature

is, indeed, the king of Cyprus? It is, of course, impossible to be completely sure of it. We can only refer to schematic depictions of the king found on coins, and to verbal descriptions left to us by the king's contemporaries. When comparing the coins (Appendix I) to the portrait, a number of similarities emerge: long, curly and shoulder-long hair, a long face, a beard, big eyes that are widely set apart, straight eyebrows, a quite big nose and a small mouth with plump lips. We see these features both on the coins and on the miniature.

Furthermore, modern technologies allowed us to conduct a reconstruction of the portrait. The original picture was processed in a graphics editor (Picture 2). In the beginning, a sketch was made above the original picture. Picture 3 shows the outlines which the artist used as guidelines during the following steps of the reconstruction. In the second step, all dark areas of the miniature were highlighted (Picture 4). The picture clearly shows that the medieval artist, that made this miniature, had a keen understanding of light and shadow—which he had used during the work on the portrait. Not only is the right side of the face is darkened, but also the right side of the crown, part of the hair, as well as the area between the nose and the upper lip. Moreover, the dark red tint on the crown also seems to be a shadow. Theoretically, if the light was directed from the left side, the shadows on the face would have followed the same pattern as in Picture 4. During the reconstruction, we tried to preserve the original's shadow distribution as much as possible. The final result of the reconstruction can be seen on Picture 5. So, the age of a man on the portrait, proposed Hugh IV Lusignan, at the moment of its creation was around 60 years.

In sum, similarities between different depictions, the history of the manuscript and the cultural history of Cyprus in the second quarter of the 14th century allowed us to bring forward the hypothesis that the likeness of the shield holder in manuscript BSB. Clm, 10268 was an artistically licensed attempt at depicting the Cypriot king Hugh IV Lusignan—the person who ordered Michael Scotus' work.

In conclusion, we allow ourselves to present a portrait painted by a modern artist (Appendix II). We do not claim that this artistic portrait has an absolute original resemblance with the Cypriot king of the 14th century. Maybe some critic says that this is just an artist's fantasy. But this interpretation, based on our research of the above-said sources, gives us a little opportunity to look behind the scenes of the medieval schematic art.



Picture 2. Presumed portrait of king Hugh IV Lusignan (fragment of the miniature).



Picture 3. Outlines of the face used by the artist.



Picture 4. Face contours and detailed shadows on the fragment of the miniature.



Picture 5. The facial reconstruction.

Appendix I

Silver Gross of Hugh IV Lusignan (Metcalf, 1996, vol. II, pl. 21)



Apendix II

Portrait of Hugh IV Lusignan. Reconstructed by A.A. Bliznyuk.



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