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Hunting in Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus (1192-1570)

Nicholas Coureas

Abstract

This paper describes hunting on Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus. The sources are legal texts, chronicle accounts and even glazed pottery. The information imparted concerns chiefly the Latin nobility but also other social classes and ethnic groups. Hunting practices were directly influenced by countries and civilisations to the east and west of Cyprus, especially the Mamluk sultanate and the medieval west. Furthermore, in Venetian Cyprus hunting influenced international diplomacy. Falcons reared on Cyprus were granted to Christian and Muslim rulers whom Venice wished to favour.

Introduction

National exclusivity features strongly in the political history of modern Cyprus. It has been characterised to a great extent by an analysis and evaluation of the competing claims of Greek and Turkish nationalism and the arguments advanced in favour or against these claims. In this paper, however, which discusses hunting in late medieval and renaissance Cyprus, it will become clear that this particular sport within Cyprus was receptive to influences from the Latin West, the Muslim Near and Middle East and from Latin Greece. These influences were complementary rather than exclusive and conflicting. The multicultural character of hunting in later medieval and renaissance Cyprus, during the Lusignan and Venetian periods of its history, mirrors the multiethnic, multi-confessional and multilingual character of the island's population and cultures. These co-existed on Cyprus for four centuries, in a manner which, while not altogether free of tensions, was nonetheless characterised by a remarkable absence of violent conflict (Coureas, "Religious and Ethnic Identity" 13-25). Then as indeed now, hunting animals was a sport that acted as a unifying rather than as a divisive

influence on the ethnic and religious groups living in Cyprus, as well as involving interaction with countries and cultures outside the island.

The sources for hunting are varied, from legal texts and chronicle accounts to glazed pottery. While the information they impart concerns chiefly the Latin nobility it is clear that other social classes and ethnic groups also participated in hunting, which has remained a popular sport on Cyprus practiced by Cypriots of all ethnic, confessional and social backgrounds right down to the present day. Hunting practices and related issues like the rearing and exportation of falcons were directly influenced by countries and civilisations to the east and west of Cyprus. Furthermore, other than the dimension of recreation, hunting played a role during the Venetian period in the exercise of international diplomacy, with falcons reared to be given as gifts to both Christian and Muslim rulers whom Venice wished to please or at least placate.

Hunting in Lusignan Cyprus (1192-1473)

Hunting was a very popular pastime in Cyprus during the Lusignan and Venetian periods. The art of falconry was extremely highly prized, but other animals used to hunt down the quarry included hounds imported from Turkey and cheetahs imported from Africa via Egypt. Contacts between the Lusignan kingdom of Cyprus and the lands of Egypt and Syria, under the rule of the Mamluk sultanate that existed from 1250 until 1517, when it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks, were many and varied, despite the warfare that intermittently broke out between the two states. Trade in spices, textiles, slaves, metals and timber was lively, notwithstanding papal prohibitions in the period 1292-1344, and Mamluk metalwork may have influenced this craft on Cyprus. Copts and Jacobites, Christian monophysites from Egypt and Syria, settled in Cyprus and Cypriots likewise settled in Alexandria, Egypt. Eastern Christian clergy from both Syria and Egypt, either Melkites, Jacobites or Copts, also settled in Cyprus, at times engaging in religious polemic with the Muslims in Syria. Therefore, it is no surprise that in hunting as in other areas influences from Egypt and the Middle East in general spread to Cyprus (Coureas, "Latin Cyprus" 391-498).

One noteworthy testimony on hunting in Cyprus is found in the thirteenth century chronicle written by the nobleman Philip of Novara, a renowned man of letters and a distinguished jurist. This chronicle on the civil war that engulfed Cyprus between the years 1228-1233, refers in a poem to an experienced and knowledgeable falconer, Sir Isengrin, who handles falcons in the same way as Greek falconers handle them (da Novara 142-43). This reference illustrates how the Frankish aristocracy had no

difficulty in acknowledging the Greeks' skill in this form of hunting, even though the Greeks of Cyprus were subject to Frankish rule following the conquest of Cyprus in 1191 by King Richard I of England. The great love the Frankish nobles had for the chase appears, moreover, in an earlier part of the chronicle, where Philip explains that Sir Balian, a prominent member of the Ibelin faction, happened to be in Nicosia with only a few knights during the winter of 1229-1230, when the siege of St Hilarion was taking place, because over the winter many of the nobles were on their country estates, where among other things they occupied themselves with hunting with the use of falcons (da Novara 124-25).

The legal texts of the Lusignan period contain a number of references to hunting. The great corpus of feudal law and custom compiled by the distinguished jurist of the time John of Ibelin includes a specific reference to hunting in the additions to the text that took place under King Hugh IV of Cyprus in the year 1355. These additions were based, moreover, on similar legislation previously passed under King Hugh's uncle and predecessor, King Henry II. The law in question, concerning lost hawks, hounds and horses, stated that persons finding lost birds of prey had to send them to the nearest town within fifteen days of their discovery. Among the varieties of bird mentioned are sakers, falcons and goshawks. They would there be returned to their original owners, who were obliged not only to reward those who had found their lost birds, according to their value, but also to pay for the expense the persons finding them had incurred on feeding, watering and generally maintaining them. Those denying that they had found the lost birds and then found to have been untruthful had to pay fines corresponding to the value of the birds they had kept unlawfully, if they were knights or liege men of the king. If they had denied possessing the birds under oath and had then been found to possess them, they had to pay double the birds' value as well as a fine of 1000 bezants. If, moreover, those guilty were not knights or liegemen they were subjects to the penalty of paying double the birds' value, a fine of 1000 bezants and condemnation as thieves (Ibelin 794-96).

The provisions of this law show clearly that hunting on Cyprus took place with hounds and hawks, the various varieties of hawks employed, the risks attendant on their loss, the procedure for their return to their rightful owners following their discovery and the penalties attached to those wrongfully detaining them. It should be pointed out that hunting, even though above all an aristocratic pursuit was by no means the exclusive preserve of the Frankish nobility. Besides the abovementioned reference to Greek falconers on Philip of Novara's chronicle, there exists another

testimony likewise datable to the thirteenth century, that of George of Cyprus who later became ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (present day Istanbul) under the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II. He recounts in his autobiography the privations suffered by the Byzantine nobility of Cyprus who were deprived of their estates after the Latin conquest of 1191, but observes that some of them at least remained moderately well-off despite the confiscation of part of their wealth, pointing out that he himself during his youth occupied himself not only in study but also with hunting. Clearly hunting in Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus could cut across social, religious and ethnic barriers. This in itself suggests how in a contemporary Cypriot context team and individual sports can potentially do the same and assist in healing the island's divisions (Nicolaou-Konnari 44 and n. 114).

The laws called *assizes* used in the Court of Burgesses which judged cases involving the burgess population dealt specifically with the loss of hawks, goshawks, sparrow hawks and other birds bred by the nobles, knights, burgesses and merchants. Those finding such birds had to return them to their rightful owners by bringing the bird to a place where birds of prey were customarily sold and displaying it there for up to three days. On recovering the lost bird, the owners were obliged to pay the finder any expenses he had shouldered for the bird's maintenance. If instead they sold these birds to a third party in secret and were then discovered to have done so, the rightful owners could recover their birds and the persons who had sold them unlawfully had to give the buyers back the price paid. He also had to pay a fine equal to the bird's value. If, however, the bird's owner did not come forward to claim his bird after it had been on show for three days, the person finding it could then sell it. Only if the owner had been away looking for the bird during the three days could he then reclaim the bird, despite its having been sold, and on recovering it he had to pay the finder the expenses undergone for maintaining it.

The clergy also practised hunting on Cyprus, despite prohibitions. Ranulf the Latin archbishop of Nicosia strongly reproved the abbots and monks of religious houses in the course of a provincial synod that took place in Nicosia in around 1283 with the specific aim of instructing the Greek clergy, stating that from that time onwards they were not to depart from their monasteries to engage in hunting nor possess hounds or hawks for use in hunting. While the Latin and Greek clergy in Cyprus, and elsewhere throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, diverged sharply over doctrinal matters and even more so over the question of papal jurisdiction, which the Greek clergy of Cyprus accepted unwillingly in 1260, never becoming fully reconciled to this principle, hunting

was a sport which clergy of both denominations practiced. Guy d' Ibelin, a Latin bishop of Limassol in the second half of the fourteenth century, owned a falcon with its gauntlet and had three trained falconers among his personal servants. These were all recorded as being among his personal effects following his death in 1367, when his goods and former staff were inventoried (Coureas, *The Assizes Codex* One Ch. 244 and Codex Two Ch. 242; Schabel 138-39; Richard, "Guy d' Ibelin" 105, 112).

The German traveller Ludolf von Suchen visited Cyprus in around 1350 and described the Cypriot nobles' love of hunting and the methods used in pursuit of the quarry. Maintaining that the nobles of Cyprus practised tournaments, jousting and above all hunting daily, Ludolf stated that they spent all their money on hunting. As he recounts in his travelogue, wild rams, namely the Cyprus moufflon, were hunted and caught with leopards, and the count of Jaffa is mentioned as having over 500 such dogs and one servant for every two dogs, charged with feeding and cleaning them. Nobles who went hunting in the mountains and forests with hounds and hawks spent over a whole month sleeping in tents, with camels and other beasts used to carry their foodstuffs and other necessities. His testimony proves that hunting in Cyprus among the nobility was a collective, expensive and time consuming pursuit. Prince Ferdinand of Majorca, who came to Cyprus to marry Eschiva, daughter of King Hugh IV of Cyprus, also records the count of Jaffa's birds and beasts. When King Hugh and Prince Ferdinand quarrelled over Eschiva's dowry the king began to ill treat not only Ferdinand but also John of Ibelin, the count of Jaffa, who was Ferdinand's step-father. To punish the count the king confiscated his hawks, hounds, leopards and other animals, taking them to Limassol where they were sold for one half of their real value. While John of Ibelin forms an outstanding example of the resources the wealthiest nobles could devote to hunting, this pastime was pursued by moderately well off and even impecunious Latin nobles. As has been mentioned above in the testimony of the Greek George of Cyprus, the Greek landowners descended from the Byzantine nobles who had left Cyprus after the Latin conquest of 1191 also enjoyed hunting, proof that in the upper echelons of Cypriot society the sport transcended ethnic boundaries (Mas Latrie, *Histoire de l' île de Chypre* 201 and 215).

The kings of Cyprus went hunting themselves, something attested in medieval Cypriot chronicles. Leontios Makhairas, a Cypriot chronicler writing in the fifteenth century, and the anonymous chronicle known as 'Amadi' after its last owner, which was probably written in the early sixteenth century, both state that King Henry II of Cyprus, following his overthrow by his brother Amaury in 1306, was confined in the village of

Strovolos south of Nicosia and passed his time ‘hunting with a falconer, both morning and evening’. He continued to hunt following his restoration to the throne in 1310 until his death. ‘Amadi’ tells us that the king died in the spring of 1324 at his country estate in Strovolos, where he had gone to hunt with his falconer. His nephew and heir King Hugh IV likewise loved hunting. An anonymous English traveller visiting Cyprus in the years 1344-45 described how he used to employ leopards to hunt moufflons, seating the leopards on the back of his horse. This description, recalling Ludolf of Suchen’s previous description given above, does not state how these leopards came to Cyprus, but they must have been imported from Egypt (Makhairas, I. Ch. 61; “Chronique d’ Amadi” 252-53 and 401; Mogabgab, pt 2. 57).

Here, however, another question arises. Were these leopards truly leopards, or another similar animal not named distinctly in fourteenth century Latin, hence their classification as leopards? The ‘leopards’ found in Leodolf of Suchem’s descriptions are almost certainly cheetahs. Fastest among all land animals, cheetahs were familiar in medieval Islam and never confused with leopards. From Mamluk Egypt, where they were to be encountered in the Cairo menageries and were considered quite common, they could be easily imported to Cyprus. They were used for hunting in medieval Egypt and Syria, and the twelfth century Syrian author Usama ibn Munqid recounts how his own father owned a cheetah trained to hunt, and how he used to get it to climb up the back of his horse, in the same manner as King Hugh IV according to the account of the Anonymous Englishman. Cheetahs, used together with falcons in hunting in the Islamic Near East and as far east as India, were extremely valuable, ‘the companions of princes and sultans’, who seated them on the back of their horses for both hunting and parade ground purposes. The conflation of cheetahs and leopards in western medieval accounts is well attested. Indeed, until the seventeenth century cheetahs in French were simply called leopards (Buquet, “Le guépard medieval” 12-19; Buquet, “*Animalia extranea*” 31). Therefore the ‘leopards’ on fourteenth-century Cyprus are almost certainly cheetahs.

Cyprus had skilled and famous falconers. The French nobleman Jean de Francieres, a member of the Roman Catholic military order of the Hospitallers based on Rhodes from around 1310 onwards, recorded in his hunting manual written at the end of the fifteenth century that two Cypriots were among the three best known falconers in the eastern Mediterranean. The first falconer mentioned was Sir Molopin, who used to be the falconer of the prince of Antioch, the brother of the king of Cyprus. The second falconer was Sir Michelin, who was a falconer of the king of Cyprus throughout the

duration of his career. While the French sounding names of these falconers encourages the supposition that they were Franks born and raised in Cyprus, it is quite possible that ethnically they were Greeks or Syrian Christians from one of the Eastern Christian denominations. The lack of a recorded surname for either of the two falconers mentioned above renders their ethnic or religious identification uncertain. The third falconer, Sir Ayme Cassian, was a Greek from the island of Rhodes and used to be a falconer of the masters on Rhodes. He was commendable and served for a very long time, and Francieres himself witnessed him handling and applying many good cures in the field of caring for falcons. There also exists contemporary pictorial evidence for the Cypriots' love of hunting and especially falconry, especially the depictions of hunters, weapons and other instruments used in hunting and the illustrations of falcons on articles of glazed pottery of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Richard, "Guy d' Ibelin" 898; Papanikola-Bakirtzi 567-75).

King Peter I of Cyprus was also devoted to hunting, something that caused his assassination. The king's son Peter desired some hunting dogs from Turkey belonging to James the son of the nobleman Henry of Jubail, the viscount of Nicosia and president of the court of burgesses in the capital. Henry of Jubail refused to hand the dogs over and the enraged king deprived him of the office of viscount, gaoled his son James, whom he then forced to work as a labourer on fortification works, and attempted to force Henry's daughter Maria to marry a man beneath her social station to a tailor named Camous. Maria first took refuge in the house of the Poor Clares, the female branch of the Franciscan order, and then in the Benedictine nunnery of St Mary of Tortosa. Despite this, the king had her forcibly evicted from the nunnery, placed in custody and finally put to torture. The remaining nobles, enraged and fearing that in future they would also suffer similar persecution, murdered him on 17 January 1369. Apart from Turkish hunting dogs Henry of Jubail also owned hawks, cared for by the monk George Nouzi in the mountainous village of Galata (Makhairas, I. Ch. 238, 261-69 and 277-81).

The later kings of Cyprus were equally fond of hunting. The Italian voyager and pilgrim Nicola di Martoni, who visited Cyprus in the years 1394-1395, observed following his arrival in Nicosia that King James I of Cyprus owned 24 leopards, or rather cheetahs in view of what has been said above, and 300 falcons of all kinds, some of which he took hunting with him on a daily basis. The French traveller Orient d'Ogier

d'Anglure who visited Cyprus in the years 1395-96 also recounts how this king, who he describes as a passionate hunter, sent him and his fellow travellers gifts of partridges, hares and moufflons. King Janus, who succeeded King James in 1398, also enjoyed hunting and when the Italian marquis d'Este paid a visit to the Holy Places in 1412, passing through Cyprus, the king and his wife granted him a leopard (in fact a cheetah), a small mule, falcons, small birds of Cyprus, the most beautiful falcons and many similar items, including bows from Syria and hunting dogs from Turkey. King James II, the penultimate king of Cyprus, was a keen huntsman and documents from his reign record his falconers' salaries, which included regular payments in wheat, barley and wine as well as cash. King James II died, moreover, in July 1473 from an attack of dysentery after having ventured forth from Nicosia with his courtiers for a hunting excursion near Famagusta. Following his death, a number of nobles arrested by the Venetians for opposing their annexation of Cyprus had their valuables confiscated including a number of falcons.¹

Hunting in Venetian Cyprus (1473-1570)

The Cypriots' love of hunting in general and falconry in particular continued into the period of Venetian rule. Documents from this period contain several references to the breeding of falcons in Cyprus. In a document dated 24 July 1516 the Venetian Council of Ten instructed the Venetian authorities on Cyprus to put up for auction those areas where hunters of birds could capture a large number of birds, on the condition that whoever offered 30 female peregrine or large Eurasian falcons from among the first that would be caught could then be entitled to exploit the areas. A few years later, in an application submitted in January 1524 to the Council of Ten by the Cypriot nobleman Badin Flatro, who wished to purchase the village of Pissouri in the Limassol district, it was stated that near the village there existed an area, rented for five bezants per annum, within which falcons were captured. Furthermore, in a Venetian report compiled in the year 1523 it is stated that on Cyprus it was possible to obtain black caps, hawks, wood pigeons, thrushes, doves, and numerous other birds. Stephen of Lusignan, the Dominican friar and member of the Lusignan royal house, refers to how Cypriots hunted hares, partridges and other animals, with the nobles using falcons and hounds in the chase, in his histories of Cyprus. He does not state in his account that this interest in hunting was confined in any manner to persons of a specific ethnic or religious denomination or social class. From his account one rather understands that

hunting, in Venetian as much as in Lusignan Cyprus, was a pastime that cut across, ethnic, religious and social boundaries.²

The reputation of Cyprus as regard the rearing of falcons escaped the narrow confines of the island, exciting the interest of the neighbouring Ottomans during the period of Venetian rule. In 1507, the emissaries of the Ottoman governor of Karaman received two falcons from the Venetians as presents, one being of the *zentil* and the other of the peregrine variety, and they were described as ‘extremely beautiful and excellent birds for hunting’. Ottoman officials began to express an interest in Cypriot birds of prey used for hunting from the 1560s onwards, if not earlier. In June 1560, the pasha of Karaman and Kayseri sent a military emissary to Cyprus with several gifts, who submitted a request for Cypriot falcons for his lord, and he was provided with six falcons. Shortly after his departure arrived the most senior of the Ottoman sultan’s falconers, sent by Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. Bearing letters from the sultan and the Venetian *bailo* in Istanbul, he asked for 24 falcons ‘among the peregrine and the large Eurasian variety’. Despite the current shortage of falcons, nineteen good quality falcons were found with the assistance of the Cypriot nobility. A third Ottoman military emissary arrived in Cyprus in November 1560, sent by Selim, the sultan’s son and heir, and he submitted a request for falcons and wine. The Venetians obtained falcons from Cyprus to present them to European monarchs as well. Hence Cypriot falcons played an important part in Venetian international diplomacy (Arbel, “Venetian Cyprus” 165-66; Arbel, “Cypriot Wildlife” 324).

Falcons were reared in two villages of the Limassol district, Akrotiri and Pissouri. The falconers were exempted from the payment of tax, and a tax record of 1559 includes the incomes deriving from the falcon-breeding farms in these villages. Incomes from Akrotiri amounted to 1230 bezants and from Pissouri to 830 bezants. The Akrotiri peninsula was also the breeding ground for Eleonora’s falcon. In a wider context, one sees that Cyprus was not the only Venetian island where the breeding of falcons was encouraged. Sixteenth-century documents from the island of Kythera south of the Peloponnese record the existence of a tax called the *poste delli falconi*, probably a payment for the right to collect falcons. According to a report written in 1553 by the island’s governor, this tax had been farmed out in 1539 for twenty years. The aristocratic Venier family, a Venetian family owning much land in Kythera, exported falcons to European rulers and nobleman, as happened with the Cypriot falcons, and as early as January 1495 the Venetian Senate decided that the kings of France and Spain should be given priority in the supply of falcons from Kythera. As on Cyprus, the

Venetians exploited the rearing of falcons in Kythera to further their aims in the field of international diplomacy. This use of falcons in international diplomacy, and more specifically in cultivating Venetian relations with the kingdoms of France and Spain, has parallels in later periods and even the present. Cyprus' offshore gas deposits are now seen as a potential force in encouraging the Greek and Turkish communities on the island to work together in exploiting this resource, as well as a way of cementing Cyprus's relations with surrounding countries (Arbel, "Venice and Kytherian Falcons" 39-40; Arbel, "Cypriot Wildlife" 323-24).

Hunting and rearing falcons were also seen, however, as dangerous to Cypriot national security. In 1561 Andrea Duodo, the departing Venetian governor of Cyprus claimed that the incomes from rearing falcons amounted to only 200 Venetian ducats per annum, whereas the expenses for entertaining Ottoman emissaries coming to Cyprus to acquire falcons amounted to 4000 ducats, while asserting that they were also spies. He therefore recommended stopping the rearing of falcons in Cyprus but was disregarded. The Czech traveller Kristof Harant visited Cyprus, by now an Ottoman province, in August 1598 while journeying to the Holy Places. He attributed its loss to the sins of the Christians, especially the Frankish nobility who spent sums on hunting that would have been employed better in hiring troops. He also claimed that when hunting in the open air, they took their mistresses with them, incurring God's anger. His account, if true, shows that the Cypriot nobles combined one form of sport with another. Furthermore, it indicates that their love of hunting remained famous right into the Ottoman era, by which time they had passed into the realm of memory (Arbel, "Venetian Cyprus" 166; Flourentzos 46-47). Yet Harant's account focuses solely on the popularity of hunting among the island's Latin nobility and disregards the fact that as a pastime it cut across religious, ethnic and even social lines, as stressed above. The practise of hunting continued through the Ottoman and British periods of the island's history down into the troubled first two decades of Cypriot independence and it remains popular to this day. Like the music, games of chance and the cuisine of the island it is an aspect of life that unites rather than divides Cyprus's population, and its inclusive rather than exclusive nature places it among those elements that can contribute to reunifying the island.

¹ Martoni 114-15; Cobham 29; Grivaud 48; Richard, *Le livre* nos. 53, 74, 82 and 90; Hill, vol. 3. 651; Boustronios, Ch. 185.

² Aristeidou, “Το κυνήγι” 153-54; Aristeidou, *Ανέκδοτα έγγραφα* 176-77 and 277; Lusignan, *Chorograffia* 85; Lusignan, *Description* 221.

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