Was Cyprus a Mamluk Protectorate? Mamluk Policies toward Cyprus between 1426 and 1517

Albrecht Fuess

University of Erfurt

Abstract

This paper examines the policies of the Mamluk Empire toward the Kingdom of Cyprus during the years 1426-1517 and explains the relations possible between a Muslim Empire and a post-Crusader Christian Kingdom. In doing so, the author demonstrates that it is quite appropriate to use the modern term “protectorate” for the Mamluk-Cypriot relationship after 1426, when the Mamluks managed to subdue the island militarily and took the Cypriot king as prisoner to Cairo. After this event, it is argued, the relationship between the two fulfills the requirements of the definition of a protectorate. Mamluk-Cypriot relations were outlined after 1426 through a mutual treaty. In return for its annual tribute, the Kingdom of Cyprus, the controlled state, retained domestic autonomy and control over most of its internal affairs, but lost its independence in diplomatic relations. A clear indication of this fact is that the Cypriots were required to help the Mamluks by taking measures against pirates threatening Mamluk shores in the 15th century and to serve as a naval base during the Mamluk expeditions against Rhodes. Cyprus remained a Mamluk protectorate until 1489 when the island came under the control of the Venetians.

Keywords: Mamluk, Cyprus, Crusaders, Protectorate, Eastern Mediterranean