

Introduction

In the year 1402, King Janus of Cyprus (1398-1432) attempted to reconquer the Cypriot coastal town of Famagusta from the Genoese, who had held it since the end of the devastating Cypriot-Genoese war in 1374. According to the sixteenth-century chronicler Florio Bustron, the Genoese captain of Famagusta Antonio da Guarco, desiring to help King Janus regain this important stronghold, sent him a set of keys of the town. Janus prepared his army in secret, hoping to surprise the Famagustans, and appointed two commanders over his men, the nobleman Simon de Morphou and the Oriental Christian George Billy. However, the undertaking came to nothing, as Simon de Morphou, a member of an old noble Crusader family, treacherously let the plan leak. According to Bustron, Simon did this because »he took offense to having Billy as companion, since he (Simon) was noble, and Billy was a burgess¹«.

With his (alleged) treachery, Simon was reacting to a phenomenon that scholars have been debating over the last decades: the social rise of Greeks and Oriental Christians into the higher echelons of Cypriot society during the rule of the Lusignan Crusader dynasty.

The Lusignans had come to Cyprus in 1192 in the wake of the third crusade. Richard the Lionheart had conquered the island, formerly a province of the Byzantine empire, on his way to the Holy Land during the crusade and later sold it to Guy of Lusignan. The latter was king of Jerusalem in this period but had lost the support of his subjects after the battle of Hattin in 1187. Guy and after him his brother Amaury built a new Crusader realm in Cyprus that was accepted as an independent kingdom in 1196.

On the island, the Lusignans and their aristocratic crusader followers met with a diverse society. Most of the population was Byzantine, Orthodox, and Greek speaking. Additionally, significant Oriental Christian minorities, called *Syrianoi* or *Sirici* (᾽Syrians²) in fifteenth-century Cyprus, such as Melkites, Maronites, Nestorians, and Syrian Orthodox, came to the

island, especially after the fall of Acre in 1291. There was also a sizeable minority of Armenians, along with few Jews and groups of Western merchants such as Venetians, Genoese and Pisans³.

Contacts between these various population groups occurred from the beginning of Lusignan reign on, and scholarship has focused primarily on the study of interactions between Greeks and Latins in the thirteenth century. According to Angel Nicolaou-Konnari's seminal work, many Greeks who worked in the Lusignan state administration rose socially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and became prominent brokers between the Latin élite and the Greek population⁴.

From the end of the fourteenth century onwards, Cyprus experienced a series of disturbing events with catastrophic outcomes: a war with Genoa (1372-1374) which led to the exilium of many nobles and to economic decline, a Mamluk invasion from the South in 1426, constant threats by the Turks from the East, various bouts of the plague, and a civil war in the 1460s⁵. These critical events brought suffering to Cyprus, but also opportunities and social mobility for some sections of society. Social mobility increased in the troubled fifteenth century and benefited not only Greeks, but also many Oriental Christians, who became state officials as well as merchants, though the extent of this development is still unclear. At the same time, the upheavals brought crucial changes to the noble Crusader families. Many disappeared entirely from the history of the island, while others enhanced their power⁶.

The social changes that occurred during the fifteenth century, the fate of the noble crusader families and the rise of Greeks and Oriental Christians are the subject of this study. It investigates the living conditions and social structures of the Cypriot élites, the chances of social mobility that the historical situation offered to members of diverging élite groups, and the identities that members of the élite constructed for themselves in connection with these social processes.

1 Bustron, *Historia* (Mas Latrie) 354: *s'haveva sdegnato d'haver per compagno il Billi, conciosiache lui era nobile, et il Billi era borghese*.

2 In order to reflect these source terms, Oriental Christians will be called *Syrians* in this study, cf. the detailed discussion in ch. 1, pp. 38. 46.

3 Hill, *History II* 1-5.

4 Nicolaou-Konnari, *Greeks* 59; cf. also Nicolaou-Konnari, *Encounter* 230-235.

5 The standard descriptions of the history of Cyprus under the Lusignans stem from George Hill (*Hill, History*) and Peter Edbury (*Edbury, Kingdom of Cyprus*; *Edbury, He Politikē Historia*, *Hoi teleutaioi Louzinianoï*). For the mentioned events, see especially Hill, *History II* 38-39. 48-49. 382-385. 407-413. 476-487. 548-579; *Edbury, Kingdom of Cyprus* 11. 151. 155. 207-209; *Irwin, Hoi Eisboles* 166-175; *Edbury, Hoi teleutaioi Louzinianoï* 178.

6 See esp. ch. 2.1.

The rise of Oriental Christians and Greeks in Cyprus is part of a phenomenon that scholars have studied throughout Europe: the social mobility of urban élites during the late Middle Ages, their interaction with and aspiration to become part of the nobility. These processes were sometimes, but not always, connected with shifts in noble social structures, culture and identities during the Late Middle Ages and the fifteenth century in particular. In many European regions, merchants, notaries and other professionals climbed the social ladder through their service for state authorities, which they often owed to their professional training in universities across the Latin world. Some of them subsequently acquired noble estates and even titles, and aspired to a noble way of life⁷.

Nobles in turn were dealing not only with the growing importance of these urban societies and with their role in them but also with significant economic changes. Scholars have attributed these developments to changes in agricultural production rates after the great plague that made it more difficult for lesser nobles in particular to uphold their living standards. As a result, some nobles seem to have acquired more land, while others invested in commerce and other business. And finally (in the case of Western Europe, as opposed to Byzantium), according to the established historiographical narrative, the growth of the state compelled the nobility to service, at the same time strengthening its privileges and consciousness of superiority⁸. Scholars have found both similarities and differences in Europe with regard to these general developments. A study of Cypriot fifteenth-century élites and social mobility should thus be evaluated within this European context, probing for similarities to other societies across Europe.

However, the case of Cyprus is also unique, owing to its very own social characteristics. Most importantly, the difference between the nobility and other élite groups in Cyprus was not only social, but also cultural and ethnic⁹. The professionals and merchants that climbed the social ladder and interacted, cooperated and competed with nobles, came

almost exclusively from Greek and Oriental Christian families, while the members of old noble families on Cyprus were usually Frankish, that is Western European Latins, who had often come from the Levant but had their origins in France and Italy.

Studies on Cyprus must take these ethnic and cultural differences into account. Consequently, cultural difference, contacts and conflicts have been a focus of Cypriot studies. Older works have often focused on the relationship between the Greek and Latin Churches and the question of religious identities. Generally, they discussed the enmity between the two religious communities and the oppression of the Greek Church by the Latins. Historians have also tended to adopt stances more or less directly connected to their own origin. Greek historians in particular emphasized the suffering of the Greek Church¹⁰. Later, the discussion opened up to encompass other levels of contact, such as language and culture in general. Many newer works, which are greatly influenced by methodology acquired from the various cultural turns, emphasize the peaceful interaction and acculturation between the two groups, although there are still critical opinions¹¹. Theodoros Papadopoulos was the first to coin the cultural processes in Cyprus in anthropological terms. He concentrated on the acculturation which succeeded despite the religious, ethnic and social frontiers existing on the island¹². In more recent times, Angel Nicolaou-Konnari published various articles on matters such as identity construction in the Cypriot chronicles and alterity and identity in Medieval Cyprus in general¹³. Gilles Grivaud and James Schryver have similarly worked on questions of cultural contacts¹⁴. The former in particular has published extensively on the origins of the Cypriot nation between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, common pilgrimage points, the protection of local cults by the Lusignan family and minorities in Cyprus in the medieval period¹⁵. Peter Edbury, too, has written on the relations between Greeks and Latins in Cyprus, while Alexander Beihammer has discussed the identity and self-perception of the Greeks in the early Lusignan period¹⁶.

7 For the ennoblement process of urban élites and literature on this phenomenon, see ch. 1.1, p. 35.

8 For the development of noble groups in Europe in the fifteenth century in general, see Contamine, *European Nobility*; Dewald, *European Nobility*; Aurell, *La noblesse en Occident*; as well as various regional studies, for which see ch. 1.1, p. 33, n. 2. Following the influential work of Guy Bois from 1976 (Bois, *Crise du féodalisme*), scholars until the 1980s perceived these challenges as a crisis of the nobility. As a reaction to this interpretation, research in recent time has focused on the continuity of noble society in these centuries. Whether or not one designates these developments as crisis, the nobility's reaction to them merits special attention, as Buylaert, *Crisis of the Nobility 1-2*, points out.

9 For a discussion of the use of the term «ethnic» in this study, see p. 136.

10 See Mas Latrie (ed.), *Histoire I* x, xvi; Iorga, *France de Chypre* 204. 209. 214; Hill, *History II* 6-8; Hackett, *History 2* and *passim*; Zannetos, *Historia tēs Nēsou Kyprou*; Gill, *Tribulations*; Magoulias, *Study in Relations*; Efthimiou, *Greeks and Latins*; Englezakis, *Cyprus as a Stepping Stone*; Kyrris, *L'organisation*; Pardos, *Ideologiko*. For a concise summary of this research, see *Synodicum Nicosiense* (Schabel) 36-44.

11 In a new study on Orthodox Cyprus under the Latins, Chrysovalantis Kyriacou calls these two research movements the ethnocentric and the revisionist group, see Kyriacou, *Orthodox Cyprus xv-xx*.

12 Papadopoulos, *Frontier Status*; Papadopoulos, *Domē kai Leitourgia*; Papadopoulos, *Chypre: frontière ethnique*.

13 Nikolaou-Konnarē, Glōssa; Nicolaou-Konnari, *Ethnic Names*; Nikolaou-Konnarē, *Alterity*; Nikolaou-Konnarē, *Scheseis*. In 1999, Nicolaou-Konnari submitted her as yet unpublished doctoral thesis on *The Encounter of Greeks and Franks in Cyprus in the Late twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries. Phenomena of Acculturation and Ethnic Awareness* (Nicolaou-Konnari, *Encounter*). She has kindly shared her thesis with me.

14 James Schryver's thesis was entitled *Spheres of Contact and Instances of Interaction in the Art and Archaeology of Frankish Cyprus, 1191-1359* in 2005 (Schryver, *Spheres of Contact*), while Gilles Grivaud wrote his habilitation on *Grecs et Francs dans le royaume de Chypre (1191-1474): les voies de l'acculturation* (2001) (Grivaud, *Grecs et Francs*). Neither have been published, and unfortunately, I have not been able to access either of both works.

15 Grivaud, *Les Lusignans Patrons*; Grivaud, *Éveil*; Grivaud, *Minorités*; Grivaud, *Pèlerinages*.

16 Edbury, *Latins and Greeks*; Beihammer, *Identität*. Thomas Devaney has recently published an article on Peter Thomas' policy of unifying the Christian confessions in the face of the Mamluks, see Devaney, *Spectacle*. Generally, the interest in identity questions has also resulted in the publication of three collective volumes, two of which are the result of conferences, see *Fourrier/Grivaud, Identités croisées*; *Papacostas/Saint-Guillain, Identity/Identities*; Grivaud, *France de Chypre*.

The newest work on questions of religious identity in particular has been published very recently by Chrysovalantis Kyriacou, who takes a balanced stance between a focus on cooperation and boundary maintenance and traces the multiple ways of Orthodox religious identity construction under the Lusignans¹⁷.

Research on Medieval Cyprus, which was long a marginal subject¹⁸, has boomed in the last three decades¹⁹. However, most of the recent works examine the contacts and conflicts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries until 1374, the period that has traditionally been perceived as the heyday of Lusignan reign, when the island prospered both economically and culturally²⁰. The fifteenth century, in contrast, has received much less attention, as this period is traditionally seen as a time of decline that was defined by Genoese economic oppression and by the loss of the important city Famagusta in 1374 and subsequently of the entire kingdom's independence to the Mamluks after their invasion in 1426²¹.

However, the social ascension of Greeks in the fifteenth century has given rise to some marginal debates that scholars have mostly mentioned in passing. In general, scholars have asked how broad the phenomenon of ascending indigenous families was, and whether these families became part of the Frankish crusading nobility. Moreover, scholars expressed their

opinion as to how social mobility influenced the culture of the groups concerned, as well as the culture of Cypriot society as a whole, and have chosen to postulate a strengthening of Greek, Italian or Frankish culture in Cyprus²².

Discussion of these topics is especially cursory in older works and, in line with the general research at the time, scholars emphasized separation. The great nineteenth-century expert on Cypriot history Louis de Mas Latrie did not express a detailed opinion on this matter, since his analysis hardly extends beyond the fall of Acre in 1291. He merely mentions that Greeks only attained access to the privileges of the Latins in later periods²³. Nicolae Iorga, in the last chapter of his *France de Chypre*, which he entitled *L'Avènement des Grecs* ('The Advent of the Greeks'), openly lamented the end of the *raffinée* French noble society at the close of the fifteenth century. In his opinion, noble society on Cyprus was a *belle chevalerie française* which preserved the old chivalric traditions and ceremonies – an unalloyed knightly French society. This idyllic society endured until the reign of John II and was only destroyed by James II's usurpation and his policy of favouring indigenous families over the nobles. By 1489, when Caterina Corner had to leave Cyprus, there were almost no French knights left who would have been able to follow her into exile. According to Iorga, the dying

17 Kyriacou, *Orthodox Cyprus*. For a newer critical opinion which emphasizes the conflicts between Greeks and Franks on the religious level, see Chotzakoglou, *Holy Virgin*.

18 Cyprus remained marginal until the 1980s. The most important scholar in the nineteenth century to write about Lusignan Cyprus, whose work has maintained its relevance until today, was Count Louis de Mas Latrie (Mas Latrie [ed.], *Histoire* [1861], II [1852] and III [1855], Mas Latrie [ed.], *Nouvelles preuves I/II/III*; *Documents nouveaux* [Mas Latrie]). Later Nicolae Iorga published both studies and sources of Cyprus (Iorga, *Notes et extraits IV/I and II*; Iorga, *France de Chypre*), and John Hackett wrote a history of the Orthodox Church in Cyprus (Hackett, *History*). However, the first great general history of Cyprus was written by George Hill between 1940 and 1952, covering not only the medieval but also the ancient and later periods (Hill, *History*). This standard handbook on Cypriot history was only updated by newer research by Peter Edbury and later in the 1990s. In the decades after World War II, especially Jean Richard and Peter Edbury have written on the history of Cyprus. Richard published a range of essays on the administrative history of Cyprus (Richard, *Psimolofos*; Richard, *Révolution*; Richard, *Royaume*; Richard, *Aspects du notariat*), as well as some important source editions (*Documents chypriotes* [Richard]; Richard, *Une famille*; *Livre des remembrances* [Richard]). Peter Edbury submitted his doctoral thesis on the Cypriot nobility in the earlier Lusignan reign in 1974 (Edbury, *Feudal Nobility of Cyprus*). He published it in an abridged form in 1991 (Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*), and it has become a standard study on Lusignan political history. Edbury has published extensively on Cyprus ever since. Count Wilpertus Rudt de Collenberg has published various, mostly prosopographical works on late Medieval Cyprus, which will be discussed below (Rudt de Collenberg, *Dispenses matrimoniales*; Rudt de Collenberg, *Études de prosopographie*; Rudt de Collenberg, *Domê kai Proeleusê*; Rudt de Collenberg, *Les premiers Podocataro*; Rudt de Collenberg, *Le royaume*; Rudt de Collenberg, *Cardinaux*).

19 The first comprehensive work to appear in the 1990s were the fourth and fifth volumes of the *Historia tês Kyprou*, which enlisted the contributions of various specialists (Papadopoulos, *Historia*). E. g. Gilles Grivaud wrote a detailed synthesis of Cypriot Medieval literature, later republished twice (Grivaud, *Pneumatikos Bios*; Grivaud, *Literature*; Grivaud, *Entrelacs*). Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Michalis Pieris contributed to the understanding of the chronicle of Machairas. As well as publishing various articles on this important fifteenth century chronicle (Nicolaou-Konnarê, *Chronique*; Nikolaou-Konnarê, *Diaskeuê*; Nikolaou-Konnarê, *Onomatologia*; Nikolaou-Konnarê, *Glôssa*; Pierês, *Gyrô*), they prepared a diplomatic edition in 2003 (Machairas, *Exêgesis* [Konnarê/Pierês]), while Natia Anaxagorou published a substantial literary analysis in 1998 (Anaxagorou, *Narrative Structures*). Other texts, both chronicles and documents, were re-edited and/or translated in the same years (Bustron, *Diêgesis* [Kechagioglou], *Boustronios*, *Narrative* [Coureas], *Bustron*, *Historia* [Mas Latrie], *Mach-*

aut, *Capture* [Shirley], *Cartulary of the Cathedral* [Coureas/Schabel], *Synodum Nicosiense* [Schabel], *Schabel*, *Bullarium Cyprium I-III* [III with Charles Perrat and Jean Richard]). Christopher Schabel and Nicholas Coureas worked on the history of the Latin Church in Cyprus. While the former produced a number of articles concerning the Latin church, monasteries and the Mendicant orders (i. a. Schabel, *Elias of Nabinaux*; Schabel, *Inquisition*; Schabel, *Unpublished documents*; Schabel, *Myth of Queen Alice*; Schabel, *Who's in Charge Here?*), Coureas published two syntheses on the history of the Latin Church in Cyprus (Coureas, *Latin Church I* [1998]; Coureas, *Latin Church II* [2010]). Coureas also wrote a number of articles on the island's economy in Lusignan times (Coureas, *For Pleasure and Profit*; Coureas, *Provençal Trade*; Coureas, *Profits and Piracy*; Coureas, *Trade Cyprus Sicily*; *Commercial Relations Chios*). In 1998, Gilles Grivaud submitted his doctoral thesis on deserted villages on Cyprus between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries (Grivaud, *Villages désertés*), thus also covering an important topic of the island's rural life. Alexander Beihammer edited a highly revealing fourteenth-century formula collection by a royal secretary (*Griechische Briefe* [Beihammer]). In 2005, Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Chris Schabel in collaboration with Gilles Grivaud, Peter Edbury and Nicholas Coureas published an extensive synthesis of research of the preceding fifteen years (Schabel/Nicolaou-Konnari, *Cyprus. Society and Culture*). Cf. also the discussion of research on cultural contacts and identity questions above.

20 Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus* 151.

21 Edbury, *Hoi teleutaioi Louzinianoï 177*. Scholars have only very recently addressed this lacuna. Consequently, some source editions such as two volumes of notarial registers from Famagusta and Hospitaller documents concerning fifteenth-century Cyprus have appeared (*Actes de Famagouste* [Balard et al.]; *Folieta*, *Actes* [Balard et al.]; *Hospitaller Documents* [Luttrell et al.]). At the International Medieval Congress 2014 in Leeds, a whole panel encouraging further research was dedicated to fifteenth-century Cyprus (see <https://www.imc.leeds.ac.uk/imcarchive/2014/sessions/> [12 October 2020]). Some studies on individual aspects have appeared, such as Christina Kaoulla's publications on Helena Palaiologina and King Janus' divorce (Kaoulla, *Queen Elena*; Kaoulla, *Quest for a Royal Bride*, the latter being Kaoulla's Phd-thesis), as well as Thierry Ganchou's well-informed study on Jacques de Fleury's opposition against Queen Helena and Cathérine Otten-Froux's article on Genoese enfeoffments in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries (Ganchou, *Rébellion*; Otten, *Féodalité*). However, more comprehensive studies on Cypriot society and culture in the fifteenth century are still missing.

22 An exception is Schryver, *Monuments of Identity* esp. 386, who emphasizes that Cypriot society was fragmented and did not have one general culture or identity.

23 Mas Latrie (ed.), *Histoire* I 135-140. For an assessment of Mas Latrie's ideological framework, see Nicolaou-Konnari, *France de Chypre*.

»agony« of this *brillante chevalerie* had already preceded the Queen's exile²⁴.

George Hill agreed with Iorga that no »general fusion²⁵« between the Frankish noble class and the Greek population of the island ever took place, but he conceded that many Greek Cypriots »rose to positions of importance in commerce, the army or the administration, and even to noble rank«. Nevertheless, »the ruling class in the Frankish period consisted of the royal house and the nobles, who, it was said, all came to Cyprus with Guy of Lusignan, being mostly French barons who had lost their lands in Palestine²⁶«. Again, for Hill the real change took place under James II, who dispossessed the old nobles and substituted them with Italians.

Count Wilpertus Rudt de Collenberg chose a quite different approach. In various articles published between the 1980s and early 1990s, which rely on a wide range of prosopographical material, he postulated that the old nobility, comprised of crusading families, declined from the second half of the fourteenth century and was eventually substituted by Greeks and Oriental Christians, as well as by Italians and Catalans. The reasons for this decline were the troubled events of the end of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, such as the war with Genoa in 1372-1374, the waves of plague and the Mamluk invasion of 1426 that all debilitated the Frankish nobility. These traumatic events made it possible for indigenous and immigrating families to attain power. According to Rudt de Collenberg, these newcomers constituted about 75 % of the Cypriot nobility at the end of the fifteenth century²⁷. He based this hypothesis on the assumption that every person or family who held a landed estate or had any higher function in society, such as for example holding church office, must be seen as part of the *noblesse*, or, in his texts equal to this term, *la classe dirigeante*²⁸. As a result, in his view, noble culture changed significantly during the fifteenth century: the few still existing Frankish families adopted Greek culture, as did the immigrating Italian and Catalan families. Thus, the Cypriot nobility attained a Greek, »Oriental« outlook²⁹. Collenberg's research must be approached with caution. Not only did he lack a clear definition of nobility: his work is also rife with mistakes and often lacks references. It is thus impossible to ascertain the veracity of many of his assertions.

In 1989, Benjamin Arbel argued against Collenberg's hypothesis in an article entitled *The Cypriot Nobility from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century: A New Interpretation*. Using sources such as alleged lists of nobles (see the discussion below) and information from chronicles, he focused on knighthood as an important criterion for nobility. Arbel con-

sidered only social status, and did not openly discuss cultural identity, although he saw the Frankish nobility as a relatively closed group of families until the end of Lusignan reign. However, Arbel did not negate social mobility. He acknowledged that indigenous families succeeded in attaining wealth and eventually also estates from the crown, and thus constituted »a kind of gentry, which was never officially recognised as such³⁰«. But he believed that the social demarcation line between social climbers and nobility was such that »at any given moment until the end of Latin rule in Cyprus, contemporaries could quite easily distinguish a nobleman from a Cypriot of elevated status who had not yet acquired all the necessary requisites for nobility³¹«. According to Arbel, the only formal way to become a nobleman was to be dubbed a knight. He cites the example of García de Navarra, a Catalan, who came to Cyprus under the rule of James II and was given an estate and married a Cypriot noblewoman. Only after James' death was García dubbed a knight. Arbel argues that he had not belonged to the nobility before³². Arbel relies on Florio Bustron's sixteenth-century chronicle to argue that only families who had one or more knights in their ranks should be considered noble, and families who had a landed estate but did not attain the status of knighthood should not. Therefore, in contrast to Rudt de Collenberg, Arbel arrives at a very narrow definition of nobility for the fifteenth century that equates nobility with knighthood. According to Arbel, only five or six families attained nobility during the fifteenth century³³, a striking contrast to the figures provided by de Collenberg.

Arbel's view is confirmed by Nicholas Coureas in his recent article *How Frankish was the Frankish ruling class of Cyprus? Ethnicity and Identity* (2015). Coureas does not explicitly define the nobility, but implicitly follows Arbel's definition. He generally uses offices that constituted certain proof of knighthood, such as that of viscount, as criteria to ascertain an individual's status. While other scholars think of nobility in terms of families, Coureas perceives it as an individual status. In his view, it is possible for one individual to be a noble while other members of his or her family were still burgesses. Like Arbel, he concludes that the nobility closed its ranks against newcomers and maintained its Frankish culture until the end of Lusignan rule³⁴.

In contrast to the scholars mentioned so far, Jean Richard, Gilles Grivaud and Angel Nicolaou-Konnari have adopted a different perspective that shifts the emphasis away from a narrow analysis of the nobility. Jean Richard and Gilles Grivaud analyse Cypriot society and culture as a whole, and Nicolaou-Konnari concentrates on the development of the

24 Iorga, *France de Chypre* 204. 209. 214. For a new appraisal of this work and its ideological implications, see Mureşan, *France de Chypre*.

25 Hill, *History II* 6.

26 Both quotations from Hill, *History II* 8.

27 Rudt de Collenberg, *Domē kai proeleusē* 814; Rudt de Collenberg, *Études de prosopographie* 523-524. 550-554; Rudt de Collenberg, *Dispenses matrimoniales* 55.

28 Rudt de Collenberg, *Études de prosopographie* 524.

29 Rudt de Collenberg, *Études de prosopographie* 553; Rudt de Collenberg, *Domē kai Proeleusē* 825-826.

30 Arbel, *Nobility* 177.

31 Arbel, *Nobility* 178.

32 Arbel, *Nobility* 178. For García de Navarra, see Bustron, *Diēgēsis* (Kechagioglou) 228. 242-244. 280. 304.

33 Arbel, *Nobility* 184. 187-188.

34 Coureas, *Ethnicity and Identity*, esp. 71-72. 77-78.

ascending Greek families³⁵. All three scholars see the Greek families as a defined group with a special relationship to the old nobility. Their designations of the group and its social standing, however, differ.

In his analysis of Cypriot society, Jean Richard makes a clear cut between the unfree serfs and the upper classes of society. He divides the latter into three groups: the Frankish aristocracy or nobility, the Latin, Greek and Oriental Christian burgesses and the group which he calls *hē taxē tōn axiōmatouchōn*³⁶ ('the class of officials'), or, in French, the *bourgeoisie d'office et de finance*³⁷. He defines the nobility as a group based on feudal tenure for which genealogy was crucial, and which was hierarchized according to the importance of the familial estates and of crown titles. A very probable prerequisite for membership in this group, so Richard argues, was being a part of the Latin Church. In his opinion, this group was defined by its Frankish culture until the end of Lusignan reign³⁸. The *bourgeoisie d'office*, on the other hand, recruited Greeks, Oriental Christians and Latins who worked in the financial administration and ascended into the high Frankish community by attaining important offices. According to Richard, they penetrated the *classe dominante* by forging marriage alliances with noble families and by gaining access to fiefs and ecclesiastical benefices. Culturally, they adapted to Frankish customs: »elles font leurs les traditions de l'aristocratie franque³⁹«. Nevertheless, Richard maintains that, regarding society as a whole, this process promoted a strengthening of Greek culture⁴⁰.

Grivaud and Nicolaou-Konnari essentially agree with Richard's social analysis, but they view the Greeks in a slightly different way. While Jean Richard designates this group as essentially burgess, Grivaud speaks of a *noblesse d'office*⁴¹, a term which has been used to designate groups ascending into the nobility in Western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Angel Nicolaou-Konnari has analysed the encounters between Greeks and Franks in the thirteenth century in her doctoral thesis⁴². She maintains that social mobility »led to the formation of a new kind of Greek aristocracy, some of whom climbed the ranks of the Frankish nobility in the fifteenth century⁴³«. She stresses the group's role as cultural brokers: »this Greek elite assumed thus the role of an intermediary group between the Frankish aristocracy and the Latin burgesses, on the one hand, and the Greek lower classes, on the other, that facilitated cultural exchanges⁴⁴«. Nicolaou-Konnari has therefore set a new focus on the ascending Greek families who played an important role in the cultural contacts between the groups. However, neither she nor Grivaud have studied these groups during the fifteenth century in detail.

In general, scholars maintain that there was some degree of social mobility in fourteenth and fifteenth century Cyprus, that a certain group of families ascended the social ladder, and that the nobility remained an identifiable group. However, they disagree about the designation of the ascending group, how to define its social standing, the degree of integration between élite groups and the boundaries of nobility and its identity. The cultural consequences of the social transformation highlighted are also open to debate – they range from the belief that Greeks and Oriental Christians adopted Frankish customs, to arguing for the nobility's unchanging Frankish culture to the complete loss of Frankish identity postulated by Rudt de Collenberg. Moreover, apart from Rudt de Collenberg, who was notoriously unreliable and used dubious methodologies, no one has studied the history of the fifteenth century systematically on the basis of the sources and the prosopographical material available.

The present study intends to follow up on these discussions by presenting new research on the Cypriot élites and by placing their development into the European context. It will be concerned with two main questions: the social developments and social mobility among the Cypriot élite, and the processes of identity construction that were intertwined with these social changes. The study will span the period between the year 1374, which marks the end of the Genoese-Cypriot war, a crucial moment for the Cypriot nobility, and the 1460s, when the last Lusignan King James II came to power and introduced new policies that altered the structure and outlook of Cypriot society. The basis of the analysis is a prosopographical database that registers every known member of the élite during this time span.

To ground the investigation, I will first discuss which élite groups existed in Cyprus and how we may define and grasp them in **chapter one**. I will examine both the Frankish nobility and the group of ascending families that was part of the aristocracy, as were various Western immigrants who integrated into Cypriot noble society. Crucially, not only Greeks but also many Oriental Christians were part of the ascending aristocracy and played an important role in the government of the state. They will therefore also figure prominently in this study.

On this fundament, I will build a social analysis of these groups in **chapters two and three** that intends to answer some of the questions posed in former research on social mobility, such as who and how many members of Greek and Oriental Christian families actually became part of the nobility. However, my analysis goes beyond these questions by asking in general how the nobility and other aristocratic

35 See Richard, *Politikoi kai koinōnikoi thesmoi*; Richard, *Culture franque*; Grivaud, *Ordine*; Nicolaou-Konnari, *Encounter*.

36 Richard, *Politikoi kai koinōnikoi thesmoi* 364.

37 Richard, *Culture franque* 403.

38 Richard, *Culture franque* 405.

39 Richard, *Culture franque* 414.

40 Richard, *Politikoi kai koinōnikoi thesmoi* 355-356. 364; Richard, *Culture franque* 403. 414.

41 Grivaud, *Ordine* 536.

42 See esp. Nicolaou-Konnari, *Encounter* 224-235.

43 Nicolaou-Konnari, *Greeks* 58-59.

44 Nicolaou-Konnari, *Greeks* 59; cf. also Nicolaou-Konnari, *Encounter* 230-235.

groups developed in the fifteenth century: who was part of these groups? How did they develop demographically (**chapter two**)? Moreover, I will ask in how far the different aristocratic groups were in contact with each other. Can we discern any integration between these groups, both on a legal level (inclusion of Greek and Oriental Christian aristocrats into the nobility) and on the social level? Did nobles and members of the ascending families intermarry (**chapter three**)?

These chapters will illustrate that there was a fair degree of social mobility among the new aristocracy that merits a more detailed discussion especially in the highest echelons of society. In **chapter four**, I will therefore examine in how far Greeks and Syrians actually became part of the Lusignan government and how much of a role they played in the highest power élite during the fifteenth century. Were they able to upset the power balance in the Lusignan government?

The last part of this study, finally, will connect the social analysis to questions of identity. In contrast to some of the scholars mentioned above, I will not attempt to search for an answer to the question of how Greek and Syrian social mobility influenced culture in Cyprus as a whole, since I am

not convinced that social mobility of some élite groups and their ways of adaptation necessarily reveal anything about the whole of Cypriot society⁴⁵. However, I will analyse how members of the distinct groups under consideration constructed their identities on various levels such as ethnicity and social status (**chapter five**) and faith (**chapter six**). I will ask how the world of thought of these people was connected to their origin, social standing and the processes of social mobility they were involved in. Did the social changes that occurred during the fifteenth century go hand in hand with changes in identity construction? How, for example, did Greeks and Syrians who ascended the social ladder view their own ethnic and religious identities? The interdependent analysis of these aspects of identity construction with the social developments will create a new perspective on Cypriot élite society in the fifteenth century.

This perspective necessarily depends on a certain set of theoretical considerations as well as a specific approach to the sources, both of which I will explain in the following pages. Those readers more interested in the study itself and less in the theoretical background may gladly skip these pages and begin this Cypriot adventure in chapter one.

45 Cf. Schryver, *Monuments of Identity* 386, who also emphasizes that it is futile to search for one society, one identity or one general culture in Medieval Cyprus.