In 1198, the coronation in Tarsus of Prince Lewon II as King Lewon I raised the extant Armenian principalities of Cilicia to the status of a kingdom alongside the Latin kingdoms of Cyprus and Jerusalem. This was a turning point in the history of the area, which, since the middle of the eleventh century, had been settled and ruled by an Armenian military nobility enjoying increasing autonomy from the Byzantine emperor. The Armenian kingdom of Cilicia was to last until 1375, when it finally fell to the Mamluks who had been invading and conquering its territories for more than a hundred years. During its one-and-a-half-century life, the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia played a significant role in the Eastern Mediterranean. Located between the Crusader states in the Levant and Muslim Anatolia, it controlled major harbours and land routes leading east and southwards (Fig. 11.1). All the same, the new kingdom had a specific significance for the Armenians and for the historic lands of Greater Armenia, most of them being then under Muslim or Georgian rule. The king would soon claim the title of “King of all Armenians” especially through coinage. Although the general authority implied by the title was mostly symbolic, the kingdom represented a political identity that the Armenians had not experienced since the Arsacid monarchy collapsed in 526, and in spite of a series of short-lived Armenian kingdoms that had
grown out of the Abbasid Caliphate. This double importance survived the fall of the Cilician kingdom and determined the approaches to its history: as a Mediterranean component, it was integrated along with Jerusalem in the *intitulatio* of the Lusignan kings, while its national Armenian significance continued to be embodied by the Catholicos (Katołikos), the Armenian patriarch, up until 1441, when the Holy See was established again in Etchmiadzin in Greater Armenia.

Thanks to its crucial place in the world of the Crusades, Armenian Cilicia has been a field extensively discussed in Armenian Studies as well as in general medieval scholarship but mainly within the framework of *histoire événementielle*. Very little is known about the courtly and aristocratic culture of the Armenian principalities and kingdom beyond general assessments of its cosmopolitan character: Frankish culture had a strong impact on lay aristocratic society, though it is delicate to measure how thorough and effective the transformation was. In religion, the Papacy perpetually tempted and influenced the Church. Whatever its relevance, such a view is inevitably inaccurate, given the long process and the complexity of this Mediterranean Armenian state, which responded to its own Anatolian heritage and to its actual Crusader and Middle-Eastern context. The entire life of the Armenian kingdom was a permanent exercise in

---


4 The transfer of the Holy See from Sis to Etchmiatzin, near the cradle of Armenian Christianity in Vałaršapat, where it still is today, was an action of major symbolic and political significance. A concurrent patriarch remained in Sis until the beginning of the twentieth century (today at Antelias, Lebanon) but with his authority limited to the Armenians of Cilicia and northern Syria. G. Dédeyan, *Histoire du peuple arménien* (Toulouse, 2008), pp. 401–3.
