

**Assessing the Economic Impact of Mongol Expansion
Into Anatolia in the Thirteenth Century: A Methodological Attempt¹**

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Abstract

My doctoral research aims at assessing the economic impact of the Mongol expansion into Anatolia in the thirteenth century. Literary sources for the central and southern Anatolia regions are not as abundant as those for the Black Sea trade network encompassing Constantinople, Crimea and Trabzon. To compensate such discrepancy, my research identifies indicators for local economic conditions in these regions. These indicators are merchandises being traded and the records of mercantile activities. They are viewed as reflective of the local economic conditions. By locating the merchandise and mercantile activities within specific regions, my research aims to overcome the limitations inherent in the literary sources that focus on familial lineage, diplomatic and military activities.

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I. Objective and Hypotheses

Assessing the economic impact of the Mongol expansion into Anatolia in the thirteenth century is the objective of my research. To achieve this, my research examines the mercantile activities and circulating merchandises (see II.) in specific regions (see III.) in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Using these two as proxies of local economic conditions is underpinned by two hypotheses. First, the existence of regular mercantile activities at specific locations not only indicates the strategic positions of such localities but also a certain level of economic activity on the part of the merchants at that location. Second, a location with regular transient merchant activities indicates the supply of amenities or goods for travellers. Because of the limited source materials regarding *all* locations in Anatolia, these two interrelated hypotheses do not seek to address why one location or settlement is more favoured by the merchants than the others. The first hypothesis provides the basis to examine the intensity of mercantile activities in specific regions. The second hypothesis provides the basis to identify specific goods with specific regions. Combined, these two hypotheses provide a framework for reconstructing local economic activities in these regions. Even though different types of literary sources may complicate this approach, it is nevertheless a possible way to provide a basis to assess, however partially, the trade and economic conditions for particular regions.

II. Historiographical Context

Fluidity of political borders and identities in the thirteenth-century Anatolia has been the source of much research employing different approaches. Among all the entities for analysis, the merchants stand out as a distinct category. Despite different political or cultural affiliations, the merchants have been viewed as an indicator of diplomatic interactions and political realignments in Anatolia. Treating them as a distinct indicator or category is based

on the assumption of their ability to move between different, at times hostile, socio-politico-economic environments. Thus, they are viewed as the conduit of such interactions. Such approach explains the abundant research on the merchants in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cases of such an approach include research on the Venetians and Jews in the sixteenth century by Benjamin Arbel,² on the Venetians in Constantinople in the seventeenth century by Eric R. Dursteler,³ on different groups in the Eastern Mediterranean between tenth and fifteenth century by David Jacoby,⁴ and on the Latin merchants and their interactions with the Turks and Mamluks in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by Kate Fleet.⁵ Denise Aigle discussed the influence of the Christian community over the Ilkhanate's interaction with the West in diplomatic exchanges.⁶ Their status as a merchant community in Mongol China, however, has not attracted similar attention.

In short, merchants have been studied as a conduit, and indicator, of political as well as cultural exchange. This approach has produced a multifaceted understanding of the Eastern Mediterranean in and after the thirteenth century, when politico-socio-economic configurations in Anatolia became diversified. Understanding such interactions in a political framework causes the analysis to be contingent upon diplomatic interactions between political centres. Another aspect of mercantile activities has hitherto been systematically overlooked: the merchants as an indicator of local economic conditions on their way to major trade cities.

² Benjamin Arbel, *Trading nations: Jews and Venetians in the early-modern eastern Mediterranean* (New York, NY: Brill, 1995).

³ Eric R. Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: nation, identity, and coexistence in the early modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

⁴ David Jacoby, *Latins, Greeks and Muslims: encounters in the eastern Mediterranean, 10th-15th centuries* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2009).

⁵ Kate Fleet, "Turks, Mamluks, and Latin Merchants: Commerce, Conflict, and Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Byzantines, Latins, and Turks in the Eastern Mediterranean world after 1150*, ed. Jonathan Harris, Catherine Holmes, and Eugenia Russell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 327-344.

⁶ Denise Aigle, "The Letters of Eljigidei, Hülegü, and Abaqa: Mongol Overtures or Christian Ventriloquism?" *Inner Asia* 7, no. 2 (2005): 143-162.

III. Scope of Research

Regions of Lycaonia, Cilicia, and Pamphylia are the geographical regions central to my research. These three regions have not been examined systematically in the context of the commercial network of Eastern Mediterranean. Unlike other regions such as the Black Sea, mercantile activities in these regions had been overshadowed by the relative scarcity of notarial documents. That these regions were only a minor part of larger regional trade networks makes them seemingly peripheral. Several literary sources, however, allude to the trade activities taking place in these regions, or to the merchandises being traded from these regions. Apart from the significance of economic factors in political realignments, such information has not been further analysed to point out the economic significance of such mercantile activities and merchandises. In short, the presence of such merchandises implies their production in local or neighbouring regions. Without as abundant notarial documents or historical sources as those found for the Black Sea region, the economic conditions of these regions has seldom been implicated in the larger discussion of Eastern Mediterranean trade.

Such phenomena are inevitable if the scope of research is within larger geographical regions or political frameworks. It also overlooks the differing state of economic conditions of various regions and their integration with the regional trade networks. To avoid the tendency to subordinate certain regions to others in the discussion of regional trade networks, my research focuses on these three regions.

IV. Methodology

In order to reconstruct local economic conditions, there are two stages of analysis for my preliminary research. First, information regarding economic conditions is compiled and analysed. Second, information regarding locations of trade activities and types of merchandise is analysed. Literary sources such as histories and letters, though providing

sporadic information about trade, army provision, and agricultural production, are not systematic because such information has not been the major preoccupation of the writers. Therefore, information gathered from such sources will only be a preliminary basis to screen out particular sub-regions for further examination. Notarial documents (see V.) are to be used to analyse traded items and locations of trade activities. Combining these two types of information, my research provides a geographical context of trade activities. Only by clarifying locations and traded items can one then examine the production of those traded items and the implication of such production in or around various locations in these regions.

V. Sources

As a preliminary exploration of such an approach, notarial documents produced at Ayas in Cilicia at the end of the thirteenth century and literary sources will be used to partially map out the geographical distribution of such mercantile activities and merchandises being traded.⁷ Crusader literature, though not explicit or elaborate on the local economic conditions in central and southern Anatolia, also provides sporadic information. Other literary sources, such as those by Ibn Bibi and correspondence between Lusignan Cyprus and the Seljuks,⁸ will be used to further build up a basis upon which to demarcate specific geographical space before investigating the significance of merchandises or mercantile activities within such space.

⁷ C. Desimoni, "Actes passes en 1271, 1274 et 1279 a l'Aias (Petite Armenie) et a Beyrouth par-devant des notaires genois," *Archives de l'Orient Latin* 1 (1881): 434-534.

⁸ Alexander Beihammer, *Griechische Briefe und Urkunden aus dem Zypern der Kreuzfahrerzeit: Die Formularsammlung eines Königlichen Sekretärs im Vaticanus Palatinus Graecus 367* (Nicosia: Zuprisches Forschungszentrum, 2007), 170- 173, 183-184, 212-213. William of Rubruck, *The mission of Friar William of Rubruck: his journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke 1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 273.

VI. Expected Findings

As merchandises and mercantile activities are employed as proxies of local economic conditions, the extent of this correlation will be the major focus for such an approach. Without any systematic information on land distribution, taxation, demography in these regions, such question can only be approached by first establishing the geographical distribution of merchandises and mercantile activities. Therefore, my research, in its initial stage, seeks to analyse such information on merchandises and mercantile activities and correlate them and specific geographical space within the three regions, Lycaonia, Cilicia, and Pamphylia. By limiting, or defining, my research to these regions, geographical distribution of mercantile activities is to be ascertained. Such result will be the basis upon which for me to answer the initial research question: the extent to which merchandises being traded and mercantile activities reflect local economic conditions. This preliminary stage of research does not seek to answer the question on correlation because of the limitations derived from the literary sources. By looking into this aspect of economic development of these regions, my research aims at improving the general understanding of an unexplored aspect of the discussion on thirteenth century Eastern Mediterranean.