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THE BLACK SEA SLAVE TRADE IN THE 13TH–14TH CENTURY THAT CHANGED THE POLITICAL BALANCE IN THE NEAR EAST

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Abstract: *Objective:* Maritime issues tied to the Mongol Empire cover not only South-east Asia, but also the Black Sea region and the Byzantine Empire's borders, reaching as far as the Mediterranean Sea. The Black Sea commercial activity attracted the Mongols especially as it relates to a slave trade that subsequently changed the political balance in the Middle and Near East.

Materials: In this paper, I aimed to address the relevant region and the slave trade that involved many regional political powers. The primary sources and archival documents of various types reveal that the multiparty relations between the Mongols of the Golden Horde, Byzantium, and Egypt involved the captives that were taken from the Black Sea region and enslaved in the Mediterranean.

Results and novelty of research: Unlike the slaves of the late medieval period, the teenage boys sold to Cairo in the 13th–14th century became military experts who achieved a high level of political power in the Near East. This action characterizes not only the dynamism of the region, but also drove the phenomenon that led to the formation of a new statehood in then hands of the slaves known as the Mamluks. In fact, the replacement of a Mongol nomad element by a Qipchaq nomad element in the Middle and Near East was a phenomenon that brought about not only a shift in the hegemony, but also demographic and economic growth in the region.

Keywords: Black Sea, Golden Horde, captives, slave colonies, Mongols, Byzantines, Mamluks

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Relationship between nomads and the Byzantium

In 2011–12, the joint Mongol-Japanese archeological expedition in Bulgan province (Bayannuur, Ulaan Herem, Mongolia) has excavated the *Shoroon Bumbagar* tomb where they found some golden Byzantine coins that could have been minted in Constantinople and probably dated to the 7th century [52]. These findings prove that the relationship between the nomads in Inner Asia and the merchants from Byzantium had been already existed in earlier periods. However, my concern is a contact between Mongols and Byzantine emperors in the 13th–14th century.

In order to embark to the issues of Mongol-Byzantine relationship, it is important to discuss about many co-related contacts and ties of medieval Byzantine Empire. The defeat in August 1071 of the Byzantine emperor Romanos Diogenes by the Turkomans at the battle of Malazgirt (Manzikert) is a famous topic and taken as a turning point in the history of Anatolia and the Byzantine Empire. The period from

1071 to the fall of Constantinople in 1453 has been portrayed by historians as a period of various destructions inflicted by various armed intrusions of the Pechenegs, Crusaders, Turkomans, Mongols, and Mamluks. However, this motion is overstated, because the dynamism and cosmopolitanism for over the four-hundred year period of Anatolia with the Central Asian, Middle Eastern and Byzantine elements reflected on the significance of the region. From the middle of the 13th century, as Charles Melville argues, the Mongol contribution to the history of Anatolia [as well as Byzantium] was obvious and needs to be assessed [47, p. 51–53].

Sources

There are no surviving principal sources on the Mongol-Byzantine slave trade relationship. Byzantine sources (Pachymeres, Acropolites, Gregoras) are focused more on Latin or Turkomans' thread with a slight reference on the Mongols. The *Secret History of the Mongols* has no mention on Byzantium at all. The Persian sources of Rashid al-Din and Juvayni have references more on Anatolia. The Russian chronicles are concentrated on Pechenegs and Bulgars of earlier period. Armenian sources (Vardan Areveltsi, Kirakos Gandzaketsi) are more on the intrusion of the Seljuks through Armenian borders into Anatolia. However, Mamluk sources of Ibn Shaddad, Mufaqqdal, Yūnīnī, Ibn al-Dawādārī and others as well as some data from Genoese and Venetian account books and notarial registers reflect directly the slave trades.

Among the western scholarship F.I. Uspenskii, M. Canard, P. Holt, G. Ostrogorsky, P. Thorau, A. Ehrenkretz, J. Saunders have been tackling the Mamluk-Golden Horde relationship and the genealogy of the Byzantine Emperors [71, p. 1–16; 12, p. 197–224; 30; 53; 68; 19, p. 335–346; 61]. To my big fortune, the modern scholarship of Bruce Lippard (his dissertation of 1984 at Indian University), the volume by Kate Fleet (ed.) in 2009 on Byzantium and Turkey for 1071–1453, the PhD dissertation of Hannah Barker on the Egyptian and Italian Merchants in the Black Sea Slave Trade in 1260–1500, as well as recent articles of Lorenzo Publici, S. Karpov, M. Kizilov, as well as M. Biran on the captives' cases in Mongol Eurasia, and a book by D. Hershenzon on captives culture in the Mediterranean produce more than fragmented references of the sources and, surely expand my research on slave trade [10; 57, p. 566–576; 37, p. 55–71; 39, p. 221–235; 11, p. 27–42; 29].

Political situation

Remarkably enough, the primary contact between Byzantium and the Mongols came from the Black Sea commerce, and not from immediate conquest. The borders of the Black Sea, where the trade was a profitable business, were under the different powers in different periods. In fact, prior to the Mongol invasion although for a relatively short period, the forthcoming relations and commercial exchanges were established between Nicaea and the Seljuks. In 1243, the Mongols defeated the Seljuks, whose control was fractured, resulting in the emergence of various beyliks on the western coast of Anatolia¹. The Black Sea commerce surely attracted the Mongols. Therefore, the Mongol threat receded in the region. However, this condition brought some hostilities that resumed once again between Nicaea and Seljuks. From 1250 onwards, John III Doukas Vatatzes, the emperor of Nicaea (1221–1254) undertook

¹ On the two emirates see [42, p. 10 ff]. On their relations with the Venetians see [78].

a number of expeditions to hold back Turkoman and Seljuk encroachment along the frontier [3, Vol. 1, § 65, p. 136]. These actions prove to be fruitful; for during his long reign Vatatzes succeeded in increasing the size of the empire of Nicaea almost twice. He was the one who against all odds had laid strong economic and social foundations to restore the Byzantine Empire, which was in decline [23, p. 41–44]. Although he had emerged from all the competing forces as the statesman poised to capture the city of Constantinople, nonetheless this did not, in fact, take place under him or his son, Theodore II Laskaris (1254–58), or his grandson John IV Laskaris (1258–59), but under the usurper Michael VIII Palaeologos (1259–82), who went on to establish his own dynasty by eliminating the Laskarids [25].

The triple anti-Nicaean coalition, formed by Manfred of Sicily, Michael of Epirus and William of Villehardouin of Achaia was a primary goal for Michael to defeat. As a result of this decisive crush at the battle of Pelagonia (1259) [for details see 24, p. 99–141], the Serbian king, Uros, the coalition's ally, had to withdraw from the recently occupied Macedonian cities opening the way to capture the Constantinople. But this was not enough. Michael needed to take care of two strong economically important opponents. To neutralize any possible resistance by the Venetians, Michael negotiated with the Genoese rivals, and signed a treaty at Nymphaeum (Nymphaion) in March 1261. In accordance with this treaty, in return for extensive commercial privileges enjoyed in the past by the Venetians, the Genoese were to provide naval aid to the empire [see 21]. As it turned out, this proved unnecessary.

The capture of Constantinople was a core point for Michael Palaeologos. He hoped to reach the restoration of the rest of the empire, making his empire's role important in Mediterranean politics. However, this reasoned him to fight against the Bulgars and the Mongols over Thrace and Macedonia, the Principality (Despotate) of Epirus (1205–1479). He decided to neutralize its enemies in the west through diplomatic means and trade.

Facing political pressures Michael entered into multiple-sided negotiations with former and newly emerging powers within the region. In 1265, Michael married his illegitimate daughter Maria Despina Palaeologina to Il-khan Hülegü's son Abagha (1265–82), who agreed to be baptized [64, p. 470]². Berke of the Golden Horde persuaded his victorious nephew Noqai (d. 1299) to marry another illegitimate daughter of the Emperor Michael VIII, Euphrosyne Palaeologina, in 1266 [49, p. 44; 73, p. 79]³. Thereafter, Michael managed to remain friendly to both warring Mongol parties and Egypt as well.

² Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos (1261–82), who had controlled the truncated Byzantine realms from Nicaea since 1259, was actually frightened when one of the two joint Seljuk rulers, Izz al-Dīn, was dethroned by Hülegü in 1262, and fled to Constantinople. In order to assure his friendship towards the Il-khan, Michael offered him his illegitimate daughter in marriage [62, p. 70–71]. However, Maria arrived after his death, so she was given to his successor [35, p. 710; 50, p. 80–81]. Maria like the other princesses married off to Mongol khans functioned as protectress of the Orthodox Church in Mongol territories. She brought with her to Il-khanid court a portable chapel; she encouraged the construction of the Orthodox Church in Tabriz, a convent in Bartelli and a Church of Our Lady in Urmia. In Constantinople she founded a Church of Saint Maria of the Mongols [45, p. 160].

³ Noqai controlled the western frontiers of the Golden Horde. In 1265, he led his army across the Danube, making the Byzantine forces flee, and devastated the region of Thrace. Therefore, this marriage was important for the Emperor. G. Vernadsky dates it to 1273 [74, p. 172]. In the winter of 1287–88, Noqai plundered Poland mainly for the spoils of war [27, p. 70].

Besides the Mongols, by that time Michael had to fight on three other fronts: he entered into negotiations with the papacy; he was forced to end his alliance with Genoa for the latter had been defeated by the Venetians in the Gulf of Nafplio (Nauplia) in the spring of 1263, and the Byzantine emperor began negotiations with Venice in 1265. But, the Venetians were slow to ratify the treaty,⁴ and the Genoese had established their dominance in the Black Sea in 1260. Michael decided to renew his agreements with the Genoese in 1267 by granting the latter quarters in Galata, a suburb in Constantinople, which was to develop into an important commercial base [54, p. 535–537]. This was actually the apogee of the Black Sea slave trade enterprise that lasted until the Ottomans conquered the Crimean peninsula, and thus the Genoa's largest Black Sea colony at Caffa in 1475 [10, p. 2].

Slave trade

The new political situation with the Mongols at presence in the region increased the interest of slave or human trafficking. The trade routes Constantinople–Tabriz, Constantinople–Sarai, Constantinople–Ayas, and Constantinople–Cairo in addition to Genoa and Venice for grain, salt, fish, bees wax, honey, hides, and surely slaves (at Caffa) involving coin minting (Golden Horde, Il-khanid coins, *sommo*, Qipchaq dirhem, *ab* (asperos barichatos), *tamgha-danak* and etc.) [45, p. 100–125] were more powerful and profitable business than any military actions.

However, the Golden Horde (along with its Balkan and Caucasian neighbours) was the dominant source of slaves from Qipchaq steppes for markets throughout the Mediterranean via diplomatic bargaining power. The Black Sea became not only a source of slaves during medieval period providing merchants with income and revenue, but also through this commerce the states were provided with military workforces. Thus the war-slaves, initially of Qipchaq origin, were imported as children, converted to Islam, trained as elite soldiers, freed, and given posts in the army and government; thus new dynasty of Mamluks has been emerged in the Near East, which played a crucial role in eliminating the powerful position of the Hülegüid Mongols in the region.

The recent scholarships reveal that in the business of slave trade in the Black Sea region three political powers were deeply involved: the Mongols, the Byzantines (via Italian city-states) and the Mamluks. The Mamluk Sultanate requires as many as possible the slave children. The Mongol conquests of the western steppe from the 1220s to the 1240s would have generated thousands of slaves, enough to support the rapid expansion of the Mamluk corps under al-Şāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb [15, p. 171; 8, p. 474; 58, p. 83; 51, p. 65; 2, p. 3–4; 34, p. 234–235]. These included the future sultans al-Manşūr Qalawūn, a Qipchaq, who was captured and sold by the Mongols to al-Şāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, the ruler of Egypt, as well as al-Zāhir Baybars, who fled from Qipchaq territory to Bulgaria and later he was sold at the slave market at Sivas and brought to Cairo. The Genoese and Venetians' interest through their colonies at Caffa and Tana respectively, regulated a shipping process of these slaves along with other commodities.

⁴ The treaty was in fact ratified in 1268.

The trading parties or the individual consumers of slaves gain a privilege to supply a large variety of enslaved men and women⁵. Until the late thirteenth century, Russian vassals of the Mongols were required to send a tithe of all their possessions, including livestock and people, to the Mongol khan as tribute. The tithed people might then be employed as soldiers, artisans, or domestic servants, or might be sold as slaves for cash [46, p. 149]. The Mamluk sultan al-Manşūr Qalawūn reportedly acquired Russians, Circassians, and Alans whom the Mongols had acquired as captives or tribute [67, Vol. 3, p. 779–780]⁶.

Slave colonies

Through its colony at Caffa and its bustling settlements in other major ports, Genoa was able to control shipping and regulate the slave trade throughout the Black Sea. Venice did not possess a colony of its own there, but the Venetian community at Tana competed with the Genoese in trading slaves and other commodities⁷.

The rivalry between Genoa and Venice for control of the Black Sea and its lucrative supply of slaves was the one element, and an important one, in their ongoing struggle for commercial dominance of the Mediterranean. The Genoese tried in every way to retain the monopoly of the Black Sea trade in the face of competition, principally from Venice and secondly from Pisan and Greek merchants. They succeeded in this objective for a while, but in 1308 their position was severely weakened by the sudden worsening of relations with the Mongols, who attacked Caffa and forced the Genoese to abandon it temporarily. The primary cause for the military action of Toqto'a Khan (1291–1312) appears to have been the Genoese trade in slaves, which included Mongols and other subjects of the Golden Horde whose trade was forbidden [36, p. 305].

Whether the Mongol action was undertaken out of pity for the fate of Mongol subjects is difficult to say. However, considering that slavery was hardly unknown or even proscribed within the Mongol empire, we must consider this to have been an unlikely cause. The reason was, rather, the Genoese cavalier attitude toward the prohibition imposed by the khan against trading Mongol subjects. Trade was allowed but regulated, and the ability to impose certain terms was a matter of sovereignty.

However, as it seen above, if Genoa and Venice fail in supply of slaves to the Mamluk sultanate because of the Mongols, the merchants would enjoy privileges in the profitable markets in Alexandria and Damascus because the crusaders also demanded the slaves to fight with Islamic forces. Thus, the political affair was based not only in economic interest of the region, but it involved religious aspect that makes it possible to understand the dynamics of the slave trades. In addition to this, the slave trade became demand-driven, rather supply oriented. However, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries one can observe a strategic shift from Tatars

⁵ For the data of slaves in the mid–14th century that reached more than 50% of total transaction, see [57, p. 566–576].

⁶ This passage has also been used to connect the enslavement of Circassians with raids from Khwarazm.

⁷ Venice obtained its own neighborhood in Tana directly from the Khan of the Golden Horde, Uzbek in 1332 [69, Vol. I, p. 243–244]. In the same year, Venetians successfully sent a diplomatic mission to the Armenian King Leo IV and managed to convince him that his fellow citizens could go, stay and return from Armenia. Moreover, they won the right for Venetians to freely trade in those lands [4, p. 38–39, doc. n. 14].

and Qipchaq Turks to Circassians, Russians, Alans and other ethnics. The reason is the land route from the southern coast of the Black Sea to the Mamluk sultanate via eastern Anatolia came forward, and it provided a viable alternative route to the Italian-dominated maritime route via the Aegean Sea [10, p. 5].

Culture of slavery

It is clear that a local slave trade did exist everywhere. Many slaves were taken from the Balkans, the Aegean, and sub-Saharan Africa as well as from Muslim Iberia and Sardinia [65, p. 39–55; 43]. The majority of slaves were enslaved through capture in wars and raids, but some were sold into slavery by their own families [10, p. 5].

Moreover, a set of practices associated with slavery exists and it constitutes a common culture of slavery. One of such elements is a common definition of slave status. Throughout the late medieval Mediterranean world, it was understood that slavery was legal; but its ideological basis was religious. People living in the Mediterranean region during the later middle ages could purchase slaves to a regional slave market and slave should be religiously different than their own [29, p. 19–27]. The legality of slaves' status included language, customs, origin, and physical appearance as well as direct professions of faith [10, p. 5].

Merchants generally imported slaves from the Black Sea in small numbers and sold them one at a time in markets or private homes. Brokers often facilitated these small-scale transactions⁸. Brokers or doctors might also help buyers inspect slaves for illness or other hidden faults [10, p. 6]. The contractual language used to formalize these sales was similar in both, Latin and Arabic.

Another element common in culture of slavery is for what capacity slave owners would deploy their slaves. As seen above, the slaves were required as military asset for the Mamluk state. Nonetheless slave owners used their slaves as financial and social assets as well as laborers. One often assumes that the typical slave would be male, however, the majority of slaves in the late medieval Mediterranean were female, and the exploitation of their sexual and reproductive capacities was an essential component of slave ownership [22, p. 6]⁹. Surely, the slave owners largely determined what functions an individual slave can perform. Documentary records that were accompanying the slaves included bills of sale, letters, endowment deeds and life histories of each individual [22, p. 133–138].

The study of Mamluk military slaves under the Mamluk sultanate in Egypt and Syria has been shaped by set of concerns. One area of interest is the distinctively Islamic nature of military slavery and its consequences for both the military and the government in specific historical contexts [55, p. 63–73; 17, p. 81. 70 provides less judgmental analyses of military slavery in a variety of historical contexts]. Scholars in this field study Mamluk-era military slavery as a central example because the Mamluks were among the few groups of military slaves to seize political power for

⁸ On the wholesale and small scale slave trades and the market inspector manuals, see [22, p. 133–138].

⁹ On the predominance of women, especially girls in the slave records, see [57, p. 570–571].

themselves in law as well as in practice. However, the Mamluks were able to achieve political legitimacy only by instituting systematic manumission as well¹⁰. Since Mamluk rulers were freed at the beginning of their political careers, scholars of the Mamluk state are interested in slavery primarily as it influenced the training of future Mamluk leaders [28, p. 153–163].

In the context of diplomacy between the Golden Horde, Byzantium and Mamluks, slaves were exchanged over long distances along with other prestigious objects such as jewels, luxury textiles, gold, silver, and horses. The Mamluk sultan Baybars sent black male slaves and female slave cooks as gifts to Berke, the khan of the Golden Horde, in 1262–1263 in order to congratulate Berke upon his conversion to Islam [9, Vol. 1, p. 362]. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad received eighty male and twenty female slaves as a gift from Toqto'a Khan, as did al-Nāṣir Ḥasan from Janibak Khan [1, Vol. 9, p. 280; 66, p. 110]. Gifts of slaves were also exchanged between the Mamluks and the sultan of Baghdad, the Ottoman sultan, and the king of Nubia [60, p. 213]. One mamluk, Arghunshāh al-Nāṣiri, was sent as a gift from China to Persia, where the Il-khan re-gifted him to the Mamluks [77, no. 374].

Conclusion

Several attempts to restore the Byzantine Empire were strongly connected with Mongol period in the Middle East. It gave the Byzantine Emperor a new political and economic situation and a new opportunity to resume their activities within the region. The Byzantine trade of Qipchaq slaves to Cairo had far reaching results. New dynasty of Mamluks was established in the Near East, which played a crucial role in eliminating the powerful position of the Hülegüid Mongols in the region.

The Byzantine-Mongol relations were a part of greater international concern. The multi-party alliances of Byzantium in the north-south with the Golden Horde and Egypt and in the east-west with Il-Khanate, Papacy, and Western powers through diplomacy, marriage and military collaboration were to prove that the region was a desirable pie for each party to have a finger in. In the 14th century the Byzantine and Mongol contacts waned. There is no record of Il-khanid relations with Byzantium after Abu Sa'īd (d. 1335). The Golden Horde kept communicating with the Byzantine counterparts until 1341, providing slaves, however, after the death of Ūzbeġ and Andronikos the relationship has lapsed.

Nonetheless, the important point for these multisided relations is that through the Black Sea slave trade a new Mamluk generation of political power in the Middle East has been born that changed political balance in the Near East.

¹⁰ The claim of Pipes [55, p. 18–21] that military slaves manumitted themselves informally is incorrect. Nasser Rabbat shows that a ceremony of manumission became the regular conclusion of the Mamluk training program at the beginning of the Mamluk era [58, p. 89–90]. In contexts where military slaves did not hold political power in their own names, it was not necessary to manumit them before appointing them to posts of responsibility [17, p. 78–79 and 622n].

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ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО БАЛАНСА НА БЛИЖНЕМ ВОСТОКЕ ПОД ВЛИЯНИЕМ ЧЕРНОМОРСКОЙ РАБОТОРГОВЛИ В XIII–XIV ВЕКАХ

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Цель: морская тематика Монгольской империи охватывает не только Юго-Восточную Азию, но также и Черноморский регион и границы Византии, простиравшиеся до Средиземного моря. Черноморская торговля и в особенности работорговля привлекала монголов, изменив впоследствии политический баланс на Среднем и Ближнем Востоке.

Материалы исследования: В этой статье затронут регион Черного моря и работорговля, в которой участвовали многие политические стороны. Первоисточники и архивные документы различного содержания свидетельствуют о том, что в многосторонних отношениях между монголами Золотой Орды, Византии и Египта участвовали пленники, которые были взяты в плен в Черноморском регионе и порабощены в Средиземноморье.

Результаты и новизна исследования: В отличие от рабов позднего средневекового периода, проданные в Каир в XIII–XIV веках, стали экспертами военного дела и захватили политическую власть на Ближнем Востоке. Этот момент характеризует не только динамизм региона, но и феномен, который сформировал новую государственность рабов, известных как мамлюки. Фактически замена монгольского кочевнического элемента на кыпчакский кочевнический элемент на Ближнем и Среднем Востоке отразилась не только на изменении доминирующего элемента, но и на демографическом и экономическом росте в регионе.

Ключевые слова: Чёрное море, Золотая Орда, пленники, рабские колонии, монголы, византийцы, мамлюки

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