



GENOA

GENOA, an important port city in Liguria, in northwestern Italy, which during the Middle Ages played a significant role between Europe and the East, including Persia (Kānbālīg (Peking) and Zaytūn (Ch'üan-chou). As a result of their support for the Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Paleologus (1259-82) in his struggle to regain Constantinople, the Genoese were granted the right to trade along the Black Sea shores and allowed to settle in Caffa. During the reign of Andronicus II (1282-1328), Genoa increased its commercial partnership with Byzantium and took advantage of the favorable conditions created by the establishment of the so-called Pax Mongolica, especially under Möngke (1251-59).

The first Genoese merchants arrived in Tabrīz (*Taurisi*, *Taurixi*) in 1280 where they soon flourished and reached their apex of prosperity at the beginning of the 14th century. Some of the most famous notables were Giovanni di Bertono (who was there in 1303) and Giovannino di Partissolo di Reggio who was “a scribe of the Genoese community” in Tabrīz (Balard, 1978, vol. I, pp. 137-40), the town that according to Marco Polo was a commercial center in which the Westerners would gather goods from Baghdad, Mosul, and Hormuz (Marco Polo, *Milione*, sec. 26).

In 1284, Genoa defeated its rival Pisa in the battle of Meloria (1284), thus eliminating a competitor in the Eastern trade (Ashtor, pp. 72-75). However, Genoa's most formidable enemy was Venice: the endemic struggle between these two powers to dominate the Black Sea colonies became particularly bitter in the last two decades of the 13th century. In 1302, a treaty of peace was



signed, allowing Genoa to maintain its control over the Black Sea. While in the northern part of the Black Sea the Venetian basis of Soldaia competed with the Genoese settlement in Caffa, in the Pontus the rivalry took place in Trabzon, the starting point of any eastward expedition via Persia.

The rivalry between Genoa and Venice had important political consequences: while Genoa allied with the Il-khanid ruler Arġūn Khan (q.v.), Venice allied with Töle-Buqa, the ruler of the Golden Horde (q.v.) and his enemy, the amir Noqai Būqā (q.v.; Spuler, pp. 70-71). These alliances fitted into a larger international strategy which was disturbed by the conflict between the Il-khans and the Golden Horde which culminated in 1290 with the end of the Pax Mongolica and brought about other alliances such as that involving Byzantium, the Mamluks and the Qepčāqs which aimed to impede the Il-khans' access to Syria (Canard, pp. 209-23; Cahen, pp. 303-35). In response, in 1290 Arġūn answered with an alerted policy in which Genoa played an important role. He planned to send 200 Genoese along the Tigris to be joined by another 700 hundred "Franks" by land to curtail the trade between Mamluk Egypt and India through the Persian Gulf. This plan failed because of the controversies between the Genoese parties of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines who took part in the expedition (Richard, 1952, p. 174; Bautier, p. 279).

Arġūn's successors embarked on diplomatic relations with France, England and the Papacy, with some Genoese who had previously joined Arġūn's court as interpreters playing an important role in this phase. Such was the case of Thomas de Anfusiis (Tommaso de'Anfossi) who, together with one Uguetus *interpretes*, is often mentioned in Pope Nicholas IV's correspondence (1288-92; Chabot, pp. 577, 581, 584). The most significant and documented diplomatic expedition of the time (also recorded in Mongol documents) was that of the Genoese Buscarello de Ghizolfi (q.v.), who, on Arġūn's behalf, visited the Pope (1289), the king of France Philip IV (1289) and Edward I of England (1290). In 1291 Buscarello returned from Genoa to the Il-khanid court, accompanied by Sir Geoffrey Langley, the envoy from the king of England, and reached Gaykātū's (q.v.) court in 1292. Buscarello also served Ġāzān Khan (q.v.) to whom he delivered a message from Pope Boniface VIII, in 1301. He is also famous because he named his son Argone, after Arġūn, whom he had faithfully served (Desimoni, *passim*; Haenisch, pp. 219-29; Mostaert and Cleaves, 1952, pp. 467-78; *idem*, 1962, pp., 48-49; Petech, pp. 562-65).

Genoa's colonial supremacy in Asia, particularly in Persia, was at its peak in



the first twenty years of the 14th century, despite some unfortunate events, such as Toktu Khan's devastating attack against Caffa (1307) and the expulsion of the Genoese from Sarai, the Golden Horde's capital (1308).

Ozbek's accession as khan of the Golden Horde (1312) brought a new crisis in the relations between Genoa and the Golden Horde that ended when the Genoese in 1313 reestablished their dominion in Crimea and in La Tana/Azaq (Azov). Until 1321, the Genoese also had access to the Near East and to Persia through the road via Lajazzo (Ayas-Iskenderun) in Cilicia (Bratianu, 1929, p. 158).

The strife between the Guelphs of Genoa and the Ghibellines of the Genoese community in Pera (Constantinople) undermined Genoese trade from 1321 to 1331. Besides, when Abū Sa'īd (q.v.), the last Il-khanid ruler, died in 1334, the Genoese lost their foothold in Persia and were forced to flee the xenophobic persecutions against Western merchants in the former Il-khanid dominions (1338). After some turmoil in Tabrīz (1340-41), Genoa issued two decrees (7 June 1340 and 12 April 1342) declaring a boycott of the Chobanid (q.v.) dominion. However, Ḥasan's successor, Malek Ašraf, sent an ambassador to Genoa to renew the old alliance (1344). But Malek Ašraf's failure to uphold the pact led to the abandoning of the region by Genoa. The Jalayerid ruler Oways I's attempt to revive the old pact also failed (Lopez, 1943, p.183).

Meanwhile, in the 1340s the conflict between Genoa and Venice began again; and both Republics tried to win favor with Ozbek, the Khan of the Golden Horde. Turmoil in La Tana/Azaq and Crimea led the Mongols to expel all Westerners from there and to attack Caffa, which suffered from Janibek's fierce siege (1344). This episode marked the decline of Genoa's Asiatic trade on a grand scale: Genoa still strove to control the traffic in the Black Sea, but it was seriously impaired by the perennial conflict with Venice and by the Mongols' attempts to conquer the Crimea (or *Gazaria* i.e., the Khazars' land) in 1385-86.

In 1395, Tīmūr's devastation of Ūrgenč, Astrakhan, Sarai and La Tana/Azaq (the last for its support for Toqtamiš Khan), dealt a serious blow to the Genoese economy, although it somehow managed to survive in the region (Berindei and Veinstein, pp. 124-26). In addition, in 1397 the French became governors of Genoa and in 1401 Jean II le Meingre, "Boucicaut," became its governor on behalf of the French monarchy.



Tīmūr's victory at Angora (1402) led the Genoese to try to establish contact with him in order to relaunch their activities in Asia. According to the Genoese Giacomo de Orado, an embassy led by Friar Francesco had already reached Pera on a Genoese ship (19 August 1401) and had been formally welcomed (Knobler, p. 343). It was probably the Genoese who hoisted Tīmūr's flag on the city walls of Pera (G. and J. Stella, p. 260), while at the same time helping the retreating Ottomans escape through the Dardanelles (Clavijo, pp. 111-12). They sent Tīmūr an ambassador and this probably gave origin to the character of the Genoese "prince" Axalla, destined to become the protagonist of many a popular legend about the relationship between Genoa and Tīmūr (Bernardini, *passim*).

After Tīmūr, Genoa's commerce with India and the Far East languished, while that with the Russians in Crimea and in La Tana/Azaq flourished (Berindei and Veinstein, p. 128). In 1475 the Ottomans reconquered La Tana/Azaq and the Crimea thus putting an end to Genoese presence in the area.

Genoa's trade routes in Asia followed two main itineraries: the first one, from the bases in Pera (founded in the second half of the 12th century: Balard, 1978, vol. I, pp. 105-14), led through Caffa-Sarai- and Transoxiana, i.e., the main northern gates to China. The second route started from Lajazzo (or from Trabzon), via Tabrīz-Iraq-Hormuz: from this harbor the merchants would sail towards the Far East.

The Genoese used to reach India either via Khorasan (Nīšāpūr, Ġaznī) and Urgench or by sailing from Hormuz. It is likely that the Genoese preferred the maritime route via Hormuz to China, using local boats, but there is no evidence concerning this in the contemporary sources.

There was also a route from Baghdad which from Lajazzo (Ayās) joined the above-mentioned itinerary to Tabrīz. The Florentine merchant Francesco Balducci Pegolotti noted that the route crossed Anatolia via Kayseri, Sivas, Erzincan, and Erzerum to Tabrīz. The first Genoese representative probably settled in Sivas as early as 1280, as it was an important junction on the routes to Persia and gave access to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (Bautier, pp. 281-82). In the same year, Genoa founded a colony in Trabzon, the seat of Comnenus' kingdom, a vassal state of the Il-Khans, and also their main access to the sea. The route via Trabzon is also described by Pegolotti in his *La pratica della mercatura*.



Other places on the Black Sea were common starting points of expeditions towards Persia: Samsun, Amastris, and Sinop continued their function even after Genoa abandoned Tabrīz and the Persian trade.

At the beginning of the 15th century the route via Trabzon and Tabrīz towards the Far East was presumably still used by Genoese merchants (Balard, 1978, vol. I, p. 137). The Genoese were also in Solṭāniya (Forcheri, pp. 16-17). There, in 1318, Pope John XXII founded an archbishopric with jurisdiction over the whole of Il-Khanid Iran (Petech, p. 568). By 1280 Genoese were also in Nakhichevan (Bautier, p. 282) and later in Hormuz. In 1343 we find one Tommasino Gentile who stopped in Hormuz on his way to China (Lopez, 1943, pp. 182-83; Petech, p.555).

Merchants could reach Persia from Central Asia as well: This was the case of *Gillotus Mercator* (Guglielmo de Modena) who was martyred together with some Franciscans in Almalig in 1339 (Petech, p. 558). In this region, Urgench played a significant commercial role: It was on the route from La Tana /Azaq-Astrakhan-Sarai-Ūrgenč-Almalig to Peking (Pegolotti, Passim). This itinerary offered an alternative in Astrakhan, where merchants had the choice to continue via the Caspian Sea (the Genoese preferred this route: Bautier, p. 287; Richard, 1970). Probably Genoese travelers would stop in other towns in Central Asia, such as Otrār, on the Syr Darya .

In their commercial bases, Genoese used to trade both local products and goods coming from distant regions. For example, corn and slaves came from the steppes via the northwest side of the Black Sea to Foça, where the Genoese had the monopoly of alum, a local product (Fleet, pp. 80-94).

Persia's main trading products were silk, either produced at home or imported from China, spices and precious stones. Using Tabrīz as a commercial base, the Genoese used to trade silk along with their partners from Piacenza (Bautier, p. 285, app. 15-17; Racine, pp. 1049-51). Silk was conveyed to Lucca, the most important Italian town for silk trade in the early 14th century, or to France, another important center for the silk trade. Chinese silk was called *catuxta*, *catuia*, or *captuia* (i.e., from Cathay). It seems that silk from Persia and Central Asia was more coveted by the Italian market and hence more expensive. In 1340, the municipal stores in Genoa were stuffed with silk coming from Marv and therefore called *mordocasia*.

In Tabrīz Genoese would buy silk from Ṭāleš (*taliva*) (Lopez, 1952, p. 74); from



Gīlān (*ghella*); from Lāhījān (*leggi*); from Georgia (*giorgiana*); and from Ganja (*cangie*; Pegolotti, *passim*; Bautier, p. 291).

Genoese merchant life in Tabrīz and Caffa was governed by the *Ufficiūm Gazarie*, an institution based in Tabrīz, which ruled the commercial activities in Crimea and Persia through a council of twenty-four merchants who held office for a period of six months. The Council's rules had to be observed by the whole community. Merchants were not allowed to remain more than four months in Tabrīz; they could not purchase goods for an amount of money superior to what they actually possessed in Tabrīz; they had to inform the Council regularly about the money spent in Tabrīz; they could not have any kind of business or even private relations with non-Genoese residents in Persia. Some of the Council decrees issued in the years 1316-44 are registered in the *Liber Gazarie* (kept in the National Archive of Genoa: Forcheri, *Navi e navigazione a Genova*).

So far, archive sources on the history of Genoa have not provided a comprehensive account of the relations between Genoa and the East, and many facts have to be further investigated: such as the belief that the *Codex Cumanicus* (q.v.) was edited by the Genoese in Crimea (MS Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, Lat. DXLIX; an updated bibliography is given in Piemontese, n. 393, and in Gallotta). Another Genoese manuscript of late 14th century, the *Tractatus de septem vitiis* (MS London, British Library, Add. 27695), is of particular interest for its illuminations: It contains the portrait of a Mongol khan (folio 13) which is probably one the first direct Western imitations of motifs from a Persian miniature (G. Sievernich and H. Budde, pp. 626-27). Another instance of the exchange of artistic influence can be found on the main door of the Cathedral of San Lorenzo (Genoa) where the crown on a portrait of Christ is decorated with *mīnā'i* ceramic (Gardini, forthcoming).

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