

Antagonism and Coexistence. Local Population and Western Merchants On Venetian Azov Sea in the 14th century¹

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The Mongol Empire was the product of a difficult military and political process that lasted for over three decades. From 1206 to 1240, the Chinggisid Mongols conquered most of modern China, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe and soon after, they would attack Poland and Hungary as well. The subjugation of Kiev, in the year 1240 and the consequent constitution of the Golden Horde², marked a final turning point in the history of the Eastern Slavic peoples³.

In the second half of the 13th century, the Mongol Empire became a trans-national power whose territorial extension can be compared to the 19th Century British Empire of Queen Victoria. This vastness, together with the internal organization built up by the Mongols, created the conditions for a rapid expansion of international trade. Western Europe received economic advantages because of this new situation, and the urban mercantile class of Communal Italy was its protagonist. Genoa and Venice, in particular, took advantage of this political change maintaining and sometimes establishing *ex novo* their organized presence in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. The creation of a commercial network consisting of several emporia, spread along the coast of the Black Sea, was the

¹ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to friend and colleague, Prof. Jeff Pike, who read the manuscript and with his usual kindness and availability corrected my poorly written English.

² Genghis Khan died in summer 1227. The vast territory of the Mongol empire conquered until that time was divided between his four sons. The elder son Jochi inherited the furthest land from the homeland, which was called ulus Jochi. The name Golden Horde appeared in Russia for the first time in the 17th century. The medieval sources use the term *horde* to indicate the essential spatial entity, the land on which a pastoral community established its home and within which the khan exercised his power (see Fedorov-Davydov 1973; Egorov 1972; Id. 1985; see also Atwood 2004: 426-427).

³ It is an extremely controversial and debated topic. A large fraction of Russian historiography has insisted for decades on the paralyzing and detrimental effect of the Mongol invasion on the Eastern Slavic world. According to this view, the Mongol invasion cut Russia out of the European historical development, leaving the Slavic area in a state of profound backwardness, both economically and socially; furthermore, it has created the ideological basis for the birth of Russian autocracy. The contemporary historiography is reevaluating the phenomenon, scaling down its effects on Russian history. For a general picture of the debate, see Martin 2007.

consequence of the renewed dynamism of the mercantile class and the Mongol propensity for commerce. The Asian nomads were alien to the Western urban culture but were also avid for new knowledge (see Allsen 2009) and new commodities (see Allsen 1997; Id. 2001). In other words, the Mongol Empire was a favorable context for the Western merchants to express their entrepreneurial capabilities and make them fruitful in a new framework, geographically distant and culturally remote, but very lucrative. Furthermore, the Empire created by Chinggis Khan was multifaceted. Early after realization of the military conquests, and the consequent submission of peoples and cultures, the new leading class was divergent and incapable of forming a joint defense to the outside world. On the contrary, the conquered territories were soon divided among the prominent members of the nomad aristocracy, weakening the unity projected by the Mongols at the beginning of the 13th century.

The Golden Horde granted almost one hundred years of relative peace. It was during this period that Genoa and Venice invested tremendous resources steadily increasing their commercial system in the East. The city of Caffa, in Southern Crimea, became the cornerstone of the Genoese network and a reference point for all the Western merchants who traveled in these regions. Tana was a settlement on the Azov Sea and was the most oriental emporium of the entire Italian mercantile system; at the same time, it was the terminal point of the trade routes to and from the Orient. Here, the contact and interactions with the local population were direct and constant as well as the struggles that, sometimes, turned into actual armed confrontations. Tana represents perhaps the most fascinating social laboratory to study the typology and the extent of the relations between the urban trade class of Western Europe and the local population in this area in the second half of 1300 – years in which the Golden Horde was sliding down into an irreversible decay.

The settlement of Tana was in front of the Turkish-Cuman City of Azak, in a densely populated area⁴. The Venetians, as well as their Genoese rivals, were navigating there by the first half of the 13th century (see Balard 1973; Bratianu 1927; Ferretto 1901: 99; see also Ciociltan 2012). Even earlier, in 1169, the Byzantine emperor Manuel I and Genoa stipulated a treaty that contained an obscure passage in which the Genoese merchants are allowed to trade in the imperial territory except for “Rosia et Matracha”. Given that “Rosia et Matracha”⁵ meant the Azov Sea and the mouth of the Don⁶, it seems clear that it was a stra-

⁴ On the origin of the settlement see Skržinskaja 1968; Berindei, Veinstein 1976; Karpov 1995. See also Maslovskij 2009. On the ethnic situation in Tana see Karpov 2002 and Publici 2005.

⁵ The original text is Miklosich, Müller 1860-1890, III: 35. On the interpretation of the passage see Balard 1978: 28, and footnote 44; Bratianu 1927: 175; Sokolov 1985. Also Heyd 1913: 223 and ff.

⁶ So it is in Bratianu 1929: 50. On this and for a comprehensive bibliography see the above mentioned essay of Balard 1978: 28.

tegitally important and desirable region for commerce, as the studies of Michel Balard have demonstrated (see Balard 1978).

The descriptions left to us by two minor friars, who traveled in the Mongol Empire in the 13th century are particularly interesting. None of them mentions Tana. However, they both note facts that confirm how important this area was for commercial navigation already in the mid 13th century. John Plano Carpini, sent by Pope Innocent IV in the 1240s to investigate the “new and horrible” people of the Tatars, arrives in Kiev in 1247, and there meets a group of “merchants from Constantinople” (“mercatores de Costantinopoli”) which are all Westerners⁷. William of Rubruck, a Flemish Franciscan, arrived in the lands of the Golden Horde a few years later, in 1253. He mentions the city of Matrega, south of the Kerch straits, with the following words (Rubruc 1929, I: 3, 5-6)⁸:

Ad orientem vero illius provincie est civitas que dicitur Matrica, ubi cadit fluvius Tanais in mare Ponti per orificium habens latitudinem XII miliarium [...] sed mercatores de Constantinopoli applicatens ad predictam civitatem Matricam mittunt barcas suas usque ad flumen Tanaim ut emant pisces siccatos, sturiones scilcet, alosas, borotas et alios pisces infinite multitudinis.

The organized presence of Western merchants at the mouth of the Don River appears established by 1304, when the sources mention Genoese consul Arnaldo Spinola, assisted by a scribe (Balard 1978: 151). In these years, the first clash between Western merchants and the local Mongol ruling class occurred. The causes are still unclear; however, it seems that the Khan of the Golden Horde, Tokhta, did not tolerate the profitable Genoese commerce of Mongol slaves on the Volga basin. The Italian traders purchased slaves that they resold in their *emporia* or back at home, netting substantial earnings. In any case, Tokhta ordered the arrest of all the Genoese merchants who were at that moment in Saraj, the capital of the Golden Horde and the confiscation of all their goods. Then he laid siege to Caffa. The Genoese set the city on fire and abandoned it (*ivi*: 151-152). We do not know if the consequences of the conflict affected the Azov region and particularly Tana, but it is unlikely that this area had been spared (Karpov 1995: 233).

In these years, the settlement was well known in Italy. A Florentine like Giovanni Villani, who had never traveled in that area, indicates in the geographical introduction to his *Cronica*, the eastern border of Europe with the “river called Tanai, which is in Soldania, in other words in Cumania, and it flows in the Sea of Tana, so called because of the above mentioned river” (Villani 1991: 5)⁹. It seems evident that Venice obtained the right to establish a commercial center in 1332. Uzbek, the successor of Tokhta, gave the area to the Italian Republic

⁷ The best edition of the latin text is still Pian del Carpine 1989: 332.

⁸ Now, thanks to Paolo Chiesa, we have an excellent new edition of the original text. See Rubruk 2011: 9-10.

⁹ “fiume detto Tanai, il quale è in Soldania, ovvero in Cumania, e mette nel mare de la Tana nominato dal detto fiume”.

(Balard 1978: 151; see also Heyd 1913; Karpov 1995: 229-230). The Khan was the first ruler of the Golden Horde who converted to Islam, which under him became the State religion.

An agreement between the Venetian ambassador Andrea Zeno and Uzbek was signed in 1332. It was confirmed the following year and it appears in a document drawn up by the Dominican friar Domenico Polono in August 1333 (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 243)¹⁰. Therefore, there was a Venetian consul in Tana the previous year. He was Nicola Giustiniani. In the document by Polono, the right of the Venetian merchants to land in Tana is openly granted as well as the right to build homes and live there¹¹. Moreover, the Venetian merchants have the right to own plots of land in the area given to them near the river (*ivi*: 243-244)¹². They will be allowed to dock their boats and, even more important, they will be permitted to utilize the port as a base for their exchanges (*ivi*: 244)¹³. Naturally, not all this was free. The Mongols used to apply a tax called *commerchium* on commercial transactions. At this time, the tax varied between 2 and 5% (Pegolotti 1936: 24-25)¹⁴. The Venetian merchants receive a favorable rate: 3%. However, in the following years, the Senate tried to achieve more favorable conditions from the Mongols¹⁵. Precious stones and metals attracted the Mongols. That is why Uzbek exempted these goods from taxation. If conflicts erupted in the Venetian neighborhood, the consul was in charge of resolving them (“*Istius contrate Veneti*”). All the documents produced in this period are drafted in Cuman, which was the written language of the region. It confirms that the relations, among the local governing class and the Venetian officials, were positive.

Nonetheless, the Senate of Venice does not trust the Mongols and takes precautions; apparently, the area was considered at risk. In a deliberation issued in early 1334, the Senate determines the compensation for the new consul. In the document it is stated that the Bailo of Trabzon will have to intervene economically, if necessary, to support the consul of Tana: “in order to preserve

¹⁰ “Husbecho, imperatore Tartarorum, quod tractavit et completi nobili vir Andreas Geno ambaxator pro comuni Veneciarium, presentatum curie ducali per nobilem virum Iustinum, olim consulem Tane”.

¹¹ “ut eorum mercatores venientes in Tanam, abitarent et domos hedificarent”.

¹² “retro hospitalis ecclesiam usque ad littus Tenis fluvij”.

¹³ “in quibuscunque civitatibus contingat eos facere mecationes suas”.

¹⁴ Francesco di Balduccio Pegolotti was very well informed on international trade because he was a functionary of the Florentine Bardi bank, of which was director of the London branch. The well known treaty on *la pratica della mercatura* was written in these years (even if it is probable that the information that contains date back to the end of the 1330s).

¹⁵ On 5th July 1340 the Senate orders to the consul in Tana to protest against the *datium* of 3% demanded by the Mongol governor; in the same deliberation it is stated that the Venetian neighborhood is too close to the Genoese one; the two communities get too often into violences and it is auspicious to search for a new space. From the documentation it seems that the research wasn't fruitful (see Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 44).

our and their commodities”¹⁶. Tana receives 1,000 baricate aspers¹⁷ per year, for the good of the Venetian merchants who are there (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 250)¹⁸.

In general, we can affirm that the relations between the local population and Western merchants were good in Tana, at least until the mid 14th century. The favorable economic circumstance and the massive amount of exchange created the conditions for a profitable and peaceful coexistence. The economic and demographic decline started in the early 14th century, became evident in the 1340s when the consequences of a structural and generalized crisis changed the economy of the continent forever. The Black Plague – which was the cause and effect of the countless famines in those years – carried off enormous numbers of the European population¹⁹.

Coexistence was, from this period on, often problematic not only with the locals but also between Genoese and Venetians. The problems originated in Italy, then reverberated in the *emporium* on the Azov Sea. A deliberation of the Venetian Senate, drafted on 17th March 1343, openly states that to avoid brawls in Tana, the consul should accept the plot of land (*teradego*) offered by the Tatar Emperor (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 51). However, the fear of deterioration in the relationships between Venetians and Mongols is still high due to the measures taken in erecting new buildings. In February 1334, the Venetian consul in Tana writes to the Senate asking for instructions how to construct and, if necessary, to fortify the neighborhood. The response from Venice arrives rapidly and the Senate orders to rigidly respect the agreements signed with Uzbek about the size of the land, no personal initiatives should be taken. On the other hand, the Senate clearly indicates that the consul has the authority of building, raising and fortifying if necessary, according to his opinion and after consulting his entourage (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 251)²⁰. Homes must be built in stone – which is unusual for a region where wood was the first material used for constructions (see Čoref 2012; Pubblici, 2005). The Senate granted to the consul a relatively free hand when negotiating with the Mongols; he is allowed to discuss the extension of the land given by Uzbek, but must be careful not to irritate the Khan.

The economic crisis was a food crisis as well, and the northern Black Sea basin was a significant grain reserve. Venice gives the consul in Tana a loan of

¹⁶ “pro salvamento et bono nostrorum et suarum mercationum”.

¹⁷ The baricate asper was the Byzantine currency whose name supposedly derives from the khan of the Golden Horde Berke (see Lunardi 1980).

¹⁸ “sicut sibi melius videbitur, pro honore nostro et bono mercatorum nostrorum qui erunt ibi”.

¹⁹ This is not the proper place to plunge into the demographic consequences and the figures of the Plague. The data available do not permit this. Nonetheless, it is certain that the European population went through a drastic decrease and a psychological trauma from which they would have slowly recovered. The bibliography on this topic is abundant. For a good synthesis, see Herlihy 1997; Cantor 1997; Hatcher 2010.

²⁰ “palificare cum fossa circumcirca et sine fossa”.

200 *grossi* to purchase wheat, despite the tensions *in loco* with the Mongols. The consul must reimburse the money to the *Officium Frumenti* with an interest rate of 10 *soldi* per 100 (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 252)²¹; it is a considerable sum and confirms the significant size of the Venetian population in Tana in 1332. The consul will not be allowed to demand a land larger than necessary to accommodate 50 people. He must have a *pesatore* (weigher) in order to avoid mistakes and frauds. The employee will have a salary of 50 *aspers* per month (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 253)²². In fact, Uzbek agrees on these conditions, but in Venice, the concern about a deterioration of the relationships with the Mongols is still high. In the same document, the consul is advised to go “in lordo”, which means in Saraj, the capital of the Golden Horde, and will have 40 *aspers* per day for the journey.

The Senate’s fears are correct. News of struggles, among the locals and the Western merchants in Tana, arrives as early as 1342. The rapports between different ethnicities became increasingly tense, and the documentation produced by the Venetian Senate shows a frenetic succession of letters and agreements between Venice and Genoa, Venice with the new Khan of the Golden Horde, Janibek (son of Uzbek) and the latter with Genoa. These years are the apex of the Venetian and Genoese presence at the mouth of the Don River. It may be that the growth of the Western population in Tana was the primary cause of the tension.

On 22 July 1343 the Venetian consul in Tana is ordered to demand clear proof from the merchants that they have paid the *commerchium* because it seems that many of them evaded the payment of taxes on transactions (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 53). With a deliberation issued the same year, the Senate releases an agreement, between the Khan and the Venetian ambassadors, in which the merchants are allowed to settle and remain safely in Tana (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 262)²³, but separate from the Genoese (“*separatim a Ianuensibus Franchis*”). The tax imposed on transactions is the 3%; however in this case too, metals and precious stones are exempted (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 262; Pegolotti 1936: 24). The presence, in the document, of the word *secure*, seems to prelude the rupture between the Khan and Venice. In any case, the agreement is clear: nobody shall disturb or hinder the Venetian merchants, who can circulate freely with their commodities in the entire territory of the Golden Horde. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how the ambassadors are in agreement with Janibek on the limits of jurisdiction. If the Venetians are offended or involved in a brawl, then the consul together with the local governor (the Mongols called

²¹ Since the early 13th century and until 1335, the Venetian *grosso*, also called *matapane*, was a rather solid silver coin. Its weigh was circa 3,20 grams corresponding to 24, then 26 *denari*, which means about 2 *soldi* (see Spufford 1988: 403-404).

²² “quod cessent errores et fraudes, que alias ibi in poderibus sunt commisse”.

²³ “*ipsi mercatores cum eorum mercationibus possint stare et habitare secure in dicta terra Tane*”.

these functionaries, members of the aristocracy, *noyon*²⁴), are in charge of resolving the question.

In late 1343, the situation spins out of control. The political authorities in Tana seemed unable to settle the violent struggles occurring between the locals and the Italian merchants. It is an event widely investigated by the scholars, and many sources mention it (see Karpov 1996; Id. 1997; Id. 2009). According to the chronicle of the Swiss Franciscan John of Winterturn, a “pagan” supposedly hit a Venetian merchant in the face (“pugno vel flagellum”); the Venetian merchant in turn, retaliated against the offender and his family (Wintertur 1924: 219-220). The skirmish soon exploded into an ethnic clash: on the one side the “Franks” and on the other the local “pagans”. Similar descriptions of the same event are in the accounts of Antonio Morosini (2010: 60-61)²⁵. In his Chronicle, *De origine Venetiarum*, written between 1421 and 1428, Lorenzo De Monaci mentions the riots giving a different version: the Latin merchants were victims of the Tatars’ arrogance and wickedness (“arrogantissimus Scitha sive Tartarus”, Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 268). The more precise reconstruction of the facts is, still today, the one given by Michele Giuseppe Canale in his dated, but still valuable book (Canale 1855, II: 458; see also Heyd 1913: 757; Skržinskaja 1968: 10).

Echoes of the combat reached the Italian peninsula, and Florence in particular; the chronicler Giovanni Villani writes about it in his *Nuova Cronica* (an important Florentine community of merchants lived in the Venetian neighborhood in Tana) affirming that the Venetians had killed “some Saracens” and had wounded others. Like a good trader himself, Giovanni accurately estimates the economic consequences of the incidents in 300,000 golden florins for the Venetians and 350,000 for the Genoese (Villani 1991: 1483)²⁶. The damage was substantial; so heavy that the government of Venice decided to organize a new embassy, made of 7 members whose names – all members of the upper

²⁴ The *noyon* were members of the nomad aristocracy. The formation of an eminent social class, in the traditional Mongol society, was due especially to the nomad character of the social structure itself. As a result of military or hunting prestige, some could obtain privilege from the khan and climb the social scale. The condition of *noyon* granted the possibility to control a certain territory (called *ulus* by the Mongols). The *noyon* had to provide a service to the khan; it usually was a military service. On the origin and the evolution of the Mongol society see the still valid work of V.Ja. Vladimircov, later translated in French (Vladimircov 1934). For a more recent reading on this topic see the above mentioned Bold 2002 (especially chapters 2-4) and Pubblici 2004.

²⁵ According to his account [Antonio Morosini], a Venetian was offended by a Saracen (“Chon ziò fose che fato fose inzuria a uno notable veneciam per uno de quelli saraini”). The Venetian gathered a group of people (“alguna chompagnia”) and broke into the Saracens’ house, slaughtering him and his whole family (“el dito veneciam con alguna chonpagnia la note fo a la stancia del dito sarain e, intrando per forza dentro, taia per peze lui con tuta la soa fameia”).

²⁶ “E stimossi il danno delle mercatantie e spezierie rubate per li Turchi da CCCm di fiorini d’oro a’ Viniziani, e da CCCLm a’ Genovesi”.

aristocracy – confirm the importance of the diplomatic initiative: Dandolo, Loridan, Contarini, Morosini, Gradonico. The Senate consigns them letters and grants them full powers to meet Janibek and close the negotiations with positive results.

In early 1344, rumors of the struggle between the locals and the merchants arrived in Venice. On 5th February the Senate decides to send two ambassadors to Janibek; on 12th, the Venetian magistracy prohibited the Venetians from trading in all the territory under the Tatar Khan, included Caffa, by threatening a fine of 500 *grossi* and half of the total value of the goods transported. The bailo of Constantinople is entrusted to monitor the execution of this order (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 54). In March, the news coming from Tana is still confused, and the Senate decides both to wait for a merchant, whose arrival is announced as imminent from Krakow, and to interrogate the crew of a Genoese galley coming from Caffa (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 54)²⁷.

In April, the terms of a joint embassy between Venice and Genoa are established. Ambassadors of the Serenissima will travel to Caffa and join two Genoese colleagues with who must go to Janibek and request to reinstate the conditions previously resolved (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 279-285).

The mission was not successful (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 58). In July 1345, the Venetian Senate produces a deliberation to decide the *devetum Tane* – the prohibition for both the sea republics to navigate to Tana for the next five years. The tone of the document, in this case, is very different from the previous ones, and Janibek is called “infidel” and “devil”. We find in the same document terms like “robberies”, “depredations” and “damages” (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 300-301)²⁸.

In June 1344, Venice signs a pact with Genoa, which confirms that the damages suffered in Tana were significant. The authorities of the two cities find necessary to find an agreement to recover, at least, part of the goods lost in the struggles and to obtain a refund for the heavy human losses. Unity is in this case much more efficient than a disjointed initiative (*ivi*: 279-280). The Senate recommends the ambassadors to be careful and delicate with the Mongol Khan (*ivi*: 323)²⁹. The requests that the Senate advances to Janibek through the ambassadors are explicit: first of all the liberation of all the prisoners, both Venetian, and Genoese, together with their honor³⁰. Second, the restitution of all the com-

²⁷ Krakow was about 6 days from Lwow, situated on the trade route from Germany to the Tatar countries. This commercial artery was called *via del leo* (path of the Lion) and often appears in the sources. The Venetians passed through here, even if not often, coming from Hungary.

²⁸ “cum inter imperatorem Ianibech principem Tartarorum infidelem”; and further on: “diabolo hoste humani generis suum opus nequiter faciente, orte fuerint dissensiones, errores et scandala infinita et inaudita”.

²⁹ “vadant ambaxatores predicti ad presenciam dicti imperatoris Zanibech; cui, facta salutazione decenti, exponere debeant magnum amorem et benivolenciam [...]”.

³⁰ “liberationem et redemptionem personarum, tam Ianuensium quam Venetorum”.

modities and goods sequestered to the same merchants³¹. Otherwise, Venice will demand the abolition of *commerchium* on the future transactions³². Furthermore, the ambassadors will have to carry on an investigation and estimate the entity of the damages and arrange, with the consul in Tana, a special tax to meet the restoration expenses (*ivi*: 322).

Tana was strategically too important to give up. In December 1347, the two parts sign up a new agreement that puts to an end the 1343 struggles. The language adopted in the document shows how things, in two years, have changed: “In the name of God and Muhammad, prophet of the Tartars” (“In nomine Domini et Maomethi, profete Tartarorum”). The Senate establishes that Venetians and Genoese must have a separated area (“luogo diviso da quello de Zenoesi”), that the merchants have the right to circulate freely in the region and that neither the Venetians nor the Saracens (“li franchi Veneziani” nor “li Saraceni”) should be damaged by anyone. Otherwise, the Khan will personally punish those who infringed upon the rules. Meanwhile, the Mongols raised the taxes on commodities to 5%, but only in case of finalized transactions; precious metals and stones are exempted as usual.

The events that occurred in 1343 were not limited to the Azov Sea basin. Instead, they soon spread to all the Latin settlements under the jurisdiction of the Golden Horde. In Caffa, the situation was even worse; however, the city – thanks to its size and its defensive structure – succeeded in resisting the siege by the Mongols (Canale 1855: 32-33). In any case, the struggles represent, as S.P. Karpov has noted, a turning point in the relations among the Latins and the Mongols in the Golden Horde (Karpov 1997: 66-67). In fact, even if Janibek acknowledged to the Westerners the right to return to Tana, the relations between Genoa and Venice were irreparably compromised; until the *devetum* was in force, the Ligurian City had offered to the Venetian merchants the possibility to utilize Caffa as a temporary outpost in the Levant. Venice accepted, but its merchants soon realized to be in a condition of juridical ‘inferiority’, while most of the privileges were reserved for the Genoese merchants. Politically, the situation became increasingly tense until the outburst of armed conflict³³ that started in 1350, and ended five years later with the treaty of peace signed in Milan³⁴.

After several attempts to return to the Azov Region, the two cities agreed upon a further prohibition to navigate beyond the straits. This time, the *devetum* was for three years. The measure expired in 1358. Meanwhile, Janibek had

³¹ “ac etiam restitutionem bonorum, mercationum et rerum mercatorum, tam Venetorum quam Ianuensium”.

³² This initiative is confirmed by a deliberation issued the same year, where the Venetian Senate recommends to the ambassadors, if they will be admitted to the presence of Janibek, to deliver him evidence of the damages suffered (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, I: 282).

³³ See on this the deliberation of the Senate issued on October 1350 (ASV, SCR, f. 71v).

³⁴ On the event and on the historical framework, see Pubblici 2014.

died (under mysterious circumstances, perhaps he was poisoned) and Berdibeg succeed him; the latter was favorable to Christianity and because of this, he was well disposed to the Westerners. The new Khan issued a document which confirms and renews the concessions made in the past by Uzbek and Janibek to the Venetian ambassadors Giovanni Quirino and Fancesco Bono (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 77)³⁵. In the document, it is clearly indicated that nobody should use violence against the Venetians (“algun li faza ali nostri veniciani forzo ni violentia”, Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, II: 47-48). Berdibeg offers favorable conditions to Venice. The Italian merchants should pay a tax of 5% *per cantaro*³⁶ and should live in the same area. If they cannot sell their goods, then they will not pay any taxes. Every ship that enters the port must pay three silver *sommi* to the governor of Tana. In case brawls occur, it will be the consul, together with the Mongol lord, to settle the fight (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1889, II: 50)³⁷. Finally, if Venetian ships break down in Mongol territory, nobody can touch or steal them. Also, in this case, the Genoese and Venetian areas must be divided (“desparte da li Zenoesi”) and the tax on transactions is raised to 5% on all the goods exchanged. Therefore, the clash between Genoa and Venice highlighted how inconvenient it was, for the two Italian cities to wage war in a context where they did not have control of political power. Peaceful and calm periods were much more profitable for both cities.

Therefore, the late 1350s was a time which relations were stabilized both at home and abroad. In Tana, the Latin communities found a peaceful and steady *modus vivendi*. The treaty signed in 1361 is evidence of continuing prosperity. The Venetian and Genoese doges, Giovanni Delfino and Simone Boccanegra, agreed on that the population in Tana should coexist peacefully and avoid any trouble (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, II: 66-70)³⁸.

On 26th September of the same year, the Mongol noyon of Solgat, Cothle Timur, grants the Venetian ambassador the permission to navigate until the port of Provato, east of Caffa. The same document states that in the case of controversies among the Latin population, the Venetian consul in Tana will have the authority to resolve them. Otherwise, if troubles occur with “those of the Toman” (“queli del Toman”, probably it means *tümen*³⁹, which is to say the Tatars), then it will be the Mongol noyon to assume the jurisdiction. The do-

³⁵ “e così fo fata la gratia ali Veniciani franchi, che debia habitar in la Tana”.

³⁶ The *cantaro* was a variable unit of weight commonly used in the middle ages. According to Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, the unit used in Tana in these years was the Genoese *cantaro*, which corresponded to 150 pounds (Pegolotti, 1936: 23, 32).

³⁷ “lo signor de la tera e lo consolo insembre”.

³⁸ “vivere et se habere pacifice et quiete et in bona fraternitate ac caritate et dilectione sincera, et se abstinere a rixis et brigis quibuscumque invicem inferendis”.

³⁹ *Tümen* (Mongol ТҮМЭН) was a military unit of the Tatar army formed by 10,000 men. The nomad armies, not only the Mongols, were structured on the basis of the decimal system. The troops were divided into tens, hundreds, thousands and *tümen*. The khan in person nominated the commander of the *tümen* since it was a prestigious and strategic position. After the political stabilization of the golden Horde, the *tümen*

cument insists on the importance of having the *tamga*⁴⁰ when traveling in the Mongol territory. Otherwise, the Latin merchants could be arrested and all their goods confiscated. The Mongol authorities undertake to protect the Venetian merchants, and this is – for the period – a piece of good news (Thomas, Predelli 1880-1899, II: 51)⁴¹.

On the same day, the Senate reports a sentence, issued by Berdibeg, on a controversy among Venetians and Tatars. The latter insist that they were attacked and robbed of 2,330 silver *sommi* and other goods by a Venetian galley on the route to Constantinople. The sum is astronomical. Two died on this occasion, and others were captured. A similar event occurred in Cyprus. Berdibeg orders the Tatars to turn to the Venetian consul, who must condemn, according to the agreements, his merchants and refund all the damages. The relations with other communities improve, but they remain tense. For example, on 14th December 1359 the consul Pietro Caravello⁴² and his counselors, Giacomo Contarini and Giovanni Bembo, together with the Council of the Elder Merchants, must resolve a controversy arose among the Venetian merchants in Tana and the Mongol governor Daydeluchaton “Serenissime Imperatori tartarorum” (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, reg. I/84 of 14th December 1359)⁴³.

Berdibeg died in 1359, assassinated in the context of a growing struggle never entirely settled within the Jochid family⁴⁴. The Khan had ruled for only two years, and his death threw the Golden Horde into a permanent political chaos

became a more administrative office and in some areas of the empire it became a synonymous of region, or district (see Allsen 2001b; Jackson 1999).

⁴⁰ Il *Tamga* o *tamuga* was a levy that the Mongols demanded on commodities, both for maritime and terrestrial transportation. It consisted of a seal, symbol of a khan, that was applied to the merchandise once the tax was paid (see Vernadsky 1956; Martin 1978; Halperin 2000 [in particular p. 238]). Pegolotti (1936: 15) openly writes about the *Tamunga*, that must be paid in all the Tatar territories: “*Tamunga* che si paga a Tana, a Caffa e per tutte le terre di Tarteri”. The 1st Chronicle of Novgorod, for the year 1257, writes that “evil news came from Russia, that the Tartars desired the *tamga*” and further on that “the same winter Tartar envoys came [...]; and the envoys began to ask the tithe and the *tamga*” (PSRL 1841: 56; Beazley, Shakhmatov 1914: 95-96).

⁴¹ “algun a torto non li debia far torto ne violenza, e se algun li vora far, nuy non laseremo”.

⁴² According to the documentation, Pietro Caravello is consul in Tana since July 1358 (see Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 90).

⁴³ It is precisely a *Noyon* (see *supra*, n. 23).

⁴⁴ Shortly before his death, Chinggis Khan had to personally pacify two of his four sons: Jochi (circa 1185-1227) and Chagatai (1183-1242). Being the elder, Jochi was supposed to inherit the most western territory of the empire (see *supra*, note 1), and formally be the successor of Chinggis. Chagatai did never accept this situation, as he was convinced that Jochi was not the natural son of his father. Before dying, Chinggis Khan found a solution to settle the dispute by nominating his third son as his successor, Ögedei (1186-1241). Nevertheless, tensions within the different factions never actually ended and the struggles involved first of all the Golden Horde, because of the political weakness of Jochi and his untimely death.

that will bring the end of the Mongol kingdom. Dynastic fights were frequent among the Mongol ruling class, but they had rarely reached such extreme public violence. Furthermore, Berdibeg himself achieved to the throne in a dark way, perhaps organizing the assassination of his father, Janibek. This exacerbated internal struggles, provoking a growing insecurity within the borders of the Horde and the communities that lived there suffered heavily for it.

However, commerce in those years remained lively; especially the trade of slaves, a frequent and profitable activity in Tana in which not only the Western merchants were involved, but the local population too⁴⁵. On 2nd September 1359, Francesco Aseladin, Alan and resident in Tana in the *contrada* Piscis (“habitor Tane in contrata piscis”)⁴⁶ sells to the Venetian Gabriele Natali a Tatar slave, age 8-10, for 3,5 silver *sommi* (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/4). International relations did not necessarily or immediately affect those in Tana. Still, in 1359, shortly after the expiration of the *devetum*, the Venetian Pietro Morosini “merchant in Tana” (“mercator in Tana”) gives a proxy to Vallerano and Niccolò Spinola Genoese citizen and merchant in Tana (“civibus Janue et mercatores in Tana”) to collect a debt of 30 *sommi* (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/5). On 5th September of the same year, the Byzantine Niceta son of Georgij (“filii Georgij”) negotiates the sale of a slave with the Venetian merchant Giovanni Trevisan (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/10). On 16th September, an Arab merchant, Mohammed “filii Polat Sraceni”, sells a Tatar slave to the Venetian merchant Giovanni Barocci (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/21). Mohammed seems to be a very active trader of slaves in these months (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/22). On 24th May 1360, two merchants, a Saracen and an Armenian, form a partnership to sell a Venetian merchant a Tatar slave (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/102). On 3rd June, a Russian woman, Ocholin widow of Dmitrij sells Bertolino Magnamoto a Tatar slave (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/125). On 6th July, the Alan Elia purchase, for 300 aspers baricati, the son of Andrea, Armenian

⁴⁵ This is, for instance, the case of notary Cristoforo Rizzo (see ASV, CI, Notai, busta 129, foglio 4). The deeds drew up by him, are published in Talyzina 1999. But, because of its continuity, the series of notary Benedetto Bianco’s deeds illustrate well what were the relations between the Western merchants and the local population, also taking into account the commercial relations. See also Karpov 2001.

⁴⁶ On the terminology used in the documents about the status of those who lived in Tana, see Pubblici 2005.

and resident in Tana (“habitor Tane”); the boy will go working as a serf in Elia’s house⁴⁷. The examples are numerous and could continue⁴⁸.

However, the commercial relations between the different ethnic groups are not limited to the trade of slaves. On 23rd September of the same year, Niccolò Baseggio sells a boat, that presently is docked by the river of Tana (“ad presens est in flumine Tane”) to Coza Mohammed, a Saracen banker (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/69). The next day, Bartolomeo Loredan goes to our notary, on behalf of the same Niccolò Baseggio, to put on sale the latter’s house. The building is in the Venetian Territory⁴⁹ and borders with the property of a Greek, a certain Stamilch (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/72). In October, two Alans named Anchan and Daniel, give for rent to Francesco Bembo a boat for their purposes (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/77)⁵⁰. The Saracen banker Coza Mohammed, who was from Saraj, is very active and regularly works with Venetian merchants. For example, on 18th January 1360 he lends 4,5 *sommi* to purchase two barrels of wine of Solgat (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/90 and also I/156 of 22nd July 1360); on 26th August he lends to Pietro Penzi the big sum of 220 *sommi* for a considerable batch of goods that Penzi should pay back in four months (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/193). Again on 24th September, Coza lends to Marino Barozzi 50 silver *sommi* to purchase silk on the weight of Saraj (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/237). Not only Saracens are money lenders in Tana. On 1st March 1360, Jolbey Arzagan, Armenian, gives 8,5 *sommi* to Giovanni Garduli from Lucca (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/94)⁵¹. It seems to be curious that two merchants from Trabzon go in front of a Venetian notary to sign a contract for a proxy (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/127). It is also an interesting case, probably not the only one, of a Venetian merchant – who lives in Saraj and is “at the moment a merchant in Tana” (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/144)⁵² – who sells Iacopo Zontini a slave.

⁴⁷ It is a condition both legally and in fact very different from slavery (concept due mostly Late Antiquity). The servant (*famulo*) was not purchased as an individual, but as a supplier of labor. They often bought temporarily his services, but he definitely did not loose personal freedom. On the difference between a servile status and slavery the references are plentiful and yet the debate is still open. For a general orientation on the topic, see Luzzatto 1966; Levi, 1976; Panero 1984; Di Simplicio 1987; Corrao 1991; Bloch 1993.

⁴⁸ There are many cases and it is not proper to list them all now. See, for instance, ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/80; on 13th February 1360 Gregorio di Giorgio, Greek, sells a Circassian slave to Pietro Barbo (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/92); on 9th April of the same year, the Mongol Begh Conhabaga sells a slave to the Venetian Albertino Dicunti (ASV, Id. I/102).

⁴⁹ “posita in Tana in territorio nostri civitatis Venecie”.

⁵⁰ “ad omne ipsi libitum voluntatis”.

⁵¹ In the same days, a Greek too, “Costantino quondam Teodori”, lends money to the Venetian merchant Giorgio Emo (ASV, Id. I/97).

⁵² “habitor Saraj, imperii Gazarie ad presens mercator in Tana”.

The Western merchants owned houses and businesses in a more or less stable way in Tana. The surviving records do not allow us to establish if the Latins owned estates. The settlement was evidently unfit for agriculture. However, there is the case of Ambrogio da Bologna who gives a proxy to Benedetto di Romagna and Costantino di Candia to build outside the city gates (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/27)⁵³.

Marriages among Latins, but also among Latins to Byzantines, were common when Latins had to travel to the Black Sea and the ports for trade. The cases indicated in the documentation are numerous (see, for instance, ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/27 of 17th September 1359; Id. I/78 of 7th November 1359; Id. I/158 of 27th July 1360). The economic crisis of these years had sharply limited the food supplies of Italian cities. Hence, the abundance of grains in Crimea was a crucial resource for them. Also, it represents one of the major problems, both for Genoa and for Venice during the years of the *devetum*. On 22th May 1360, a Genoese, Giovanni della Maddalena, “habitor Caffè” gives his boat for rent to Giovanni Bembo for the latter to load 500 *moggia* of wheat according to the measure of Constantinople (“ad modium constantinopoli”) and to transport them to Venice (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, I/115).

An analysis of the testaments drawn up in Tana in 1362, confirms the information found in the commercial documents. On 23rd November, the wealthy merchant Andalò Basso makes a will. He wants to be buried in the Franciscan cemetery of St. Iacopo⁵⁴. Apparently, many people owed Andalò money. For example, with the Allan publican (“tabernarius allano”) Inanixium, who lives in the neighborhood of the Alans⁵⁵, and with the Russian Michail for some wine (ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, II-testamenti 17).

In 1363 and the following year, the political situation in the territories of the Golden Horde became even worse. The rapid succession of power by several khans hastened the decline of the collective power, which fragmented into the hands of local emirs. For the Westerners who lived on the Azov Sea, the interlocutors changed, and they changed increasingly often. Political confusion grew and became general. On 21st July 1364, news about Tana arrive in Venice: the path to the Azov Sea seems to be closed, and the captains of the galley to Romania should go the route of Trabzon, but only after a consultation with the bailo of Constantinople and his counselors (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 108-9). The ships left evidently on May 1365 and 1366 (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 110-2). Nonetheless, the situation in Tana seems calm. On 2nd March 1368, the bailo of Trabzon suggests fortifying the Venetian area in Tana to secure persons and commodities. The

⁵³ “hedificandi et laborandi [...] super suo territorio et foura portam hic in Tana in territorium nostri communis”.

⁵⁴ The Franciscans had in Tana at least three churches: St. Marco, St. Iacopo and St. Maria, while the Dominicans owned at least one: St. Domenico (see Pubblici 2005: 446-454; ASV, CI, Notai, busta 19, II-testamenti: 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and atti: 19, 27).

⁵⁵ “qui morat prope balneum allanorum in Tana”.

Senate approves and decides to write to the consul in Tana immediately (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 115).

After Berdibeg's death, the Golden Horde declined into political chaos. The fight for affirmation among the minor nobility became ferocious and became impossible for anyone to re-establish the territorial unity of the Khanate, which, in fact, ceased to exist⁵⁶. The fatal blow for the Golden Horde arrived between 1378 and 1380 when the Tatar army, assemble by the general and governor of the Crimean *ulus* Mamai, was defeated twice by the Russians of Dmitrij Donskoj (see Buganov 1985; Martin 2007: 236-239). The Golden Horde will have the illusion of a rebirth during the rule of Tokhtamish (d. 1406), but it will be an illusion (Balard 1978: 455-458; see also Ciociltan, 2012: 225-240).

For those who lived in Tana, under the Crimean governor's jurisdiction, the troubles at court were never good news. A shifting power created, on the one hand, a larger political autonomy *in loco*, on the other it weakened the capability of controlling the territory provoking a drastic reduction of security for trade routes. In June 1369, the Venetian Senate tries to take advantage of the political instability of the Golden Horde, sending a formal request to Mamai "in lordo" to obtain a discount on the *commerchium*, from 4 to 3%, which is how the Genoese pay. In the deliberation, the Venetian authorities express concern about the trade routes, both maritime and terrestrial (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 121). A year later, the Senate deliberates to ship arms and a considerable sum of money to Tana to repair the fortifications (Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 124).

In the 1370s, the political climate became, if possible, even more tense. Venice clashed with the emperor of Trabzon Alexis III. The Byzantine emperor claimed that some Venetian merchants had not paid him back. Alexis repealed some privileges that Venice had in the Anatolian kingdom⁵⁷. In times of peace, the Oriental markets were accessible, it was possible to travel in a rather secure context and trade was profitable. In times of war, communications closed or, at best, became more difficult. Furthermore, the tensions generated by the struggles inside the Golden Horde and the pressure from the East – where the Oriental Khanates were pushing to expand Westwards – and the conflict exploded among Venice, and the Empire of Trabzon led to the war of Chioggia. Between 1376 and 1381, Genoa and Venice were once again fighting one against another. The peace was concluded in Turin and the travels to the Azov Sea begun again only in 1383⁵⁸. It was a momentary peace. The troubles inside the Golden Horde turned, in the second half of the 14th century, into an actual war. The collapse of the Chagatai Khanate in Central Asia, the breakdown of the Golden Horde mentioned above, together with the decomposition of the Persian Ilkhanate into

⁵⁶ The bibliography on the history of the Golden Horde is immense. For an excellent synthesis, see Spuler 1965; Halperin 1985; Jackson 2005; Ostrowski 1998; Chrustalev 2004.

⁵⁷ On the Empire of Trabzon see Karpov 1986: 99-101.

⁵⁸ A dispatch also occurred in 1382 (see Pubblici 2014; ASV, SM, XXXVIII, f. 34v; Thiriet 1958-1961, I: 158; Karpov 1986: 101).

many small centers of power – started after the death of Ilkhan Abu Said in 1335 – favored the advance of Tamerlane. The Mongol *great emir* was the protagonist of a remarkable series of conquests whose final result was the subjugation of a large part of Central Asia. In 1395, the Timurid armies reached Tana and devastated it. Both, Genoa and Venice remained there and reconstructed the *emporium*. Nonetheless, the political framework had changed. It was not possible to go back to the previous years. The trade routes suffered profoundly from the attacks of Tamerlane. Some roads declined irreparably; others lost their strategic importance forever. Tana of the Western merchants survived still for some time until the final Ottoman conquest in 1475. Tana's strategic importance had ended much earlier.

Coexistence of the local population with the Western mercantile class in Tana during the 14th century went through several different phases. The Mongols were not hostile to the creation of foreign *emporia*, as long as the 'guests' who installed these settlements respected the political hierarchy and met their tax obligations. Since their earlier conquests in the West, the Mongols realized that a permanent state of conflict – determined by them – could and should not last forever. The 'lowering' of all the economic parameters, the insecurity of the cities, the interruption of the international trade routes and the devastation in the countryside, were all negative factors that did not allow the local population to get back on its feet and failed to initiate an economic and administrative recovery. In general, the Mongols did not impose on the districts of the Golden Horde a rigid and tight control. They often followed a delocalization method, a form of parceling out power, that allowed them to control the peripheral areas without restraining the economic upturn. They often encouraged and passed measures aimed to push the economy, especially through commerce. Genoa and Venice were able to take advantage of this situation, even if they had to deal with two unpredictable factors: on the one hand, the constant fight for succession in the Mongol Empire and in particular in the Golden Horde, on the other, the volatility of the local ruling class. The Mongol governors of the region, often and suddenly changed their political line, especially towards the Western 'guests'. For this reason, Genoa and Venice consistently tried to reach the Khan in person to obtain convenient commercial privileges. Such policy worked until the dominant power of the Golden Horde declined. When the struggle for succession became harsher, the government of the most western khanate of the Mongol Empire was not able to maintain control over the peripheral powers. All the districts suffered for this, and the Azov region was not an exception; the records show how difficult the political climate in Tana became, especially after the 1350s.

The population of the settlement found a *modus vivendi* throughout the years. The establishment of an *emporium* was not neither a simple nor a rapid process⁵⁹. In Tana, Genoa and Venice obtained areas outside the neighborhoods where Slavs, Greeks, Mongols, Alans and others lived. They often achieved the right to fortify those areas with walls and moats. More often, they had to build

⁵⁹ See the beautiful pages of S.P. Karpov (Karpov 1995: 230-231).

new houses. Frequently the Italians had to form coalitions to increase their safety in a region that still presented risks.

In conclusion, we can affirm that the relations between the Western merchants and the locals, in mid 14th century Tana, went through ups and downs: from peaceful coexistence, that was very profitable for trade, to tensions that sometimes resulted in actual xenophobia. In general, the stronger frictions were episodic, but this was mostly due to the physical separation always maintained among the different communities. Genoa and Venice tried to reproduce, *in loco*, the associative model of their homeland, building up accordingly. The Mendicant orders were decisive from this point of view since they started traveling with the merchants and settled with them in the *emporia*, building churches. The homeland made the resources available to the authorities in Tana in order to re-align power structures and, if on a smaller scale, building palaces for the consul, houses, taking security measures, organizing military garrison, shipping freight in times of international conflicts.

Therefore, even if not always easy, the ethnic relations in Venetian Tana were a fundamental step in the framework of the encounter between the East and the West in the middle ages. It was the Turkish nomadism, with the form of the Mongol invasion, which opened Asia to the Christian west. Shortly after, another nomadic Turkish people conquered a more limited area, but this time, it would establish a centuries long domination. The Ottoman era was about to begin.

In the West, and especially in Italy, the political situation was rapidly changing. The time of the Communes was coming to an end, and the era of the regional States was about to begin. The age of commerce did not end and it took a while for the Italian merchants to reorganize. Nevertheless, they never abandoned the Orient that was finally and permanently open.

Abbreviations

ASV:	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
CI:	Cancelleria Inferiore
SM:	Senato Misti
SRC:	Secreta Consilium Rogatorum

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Abstract

Lorenzo Pubblici

Antagonismo e coesistenza: popolazione locale e mercanti occidentali nel Mare di Azov nel XIV secolo

Dopo la tragica esperienza della Quarta Crociata (1204) i mercanti occidentali iniziarono a frequentare regolarmente il bacino del mar Nero. In particolare Genova e Venezia installarono in quella regione numerosi insediamenti commerciali, *emporia*, che col tempo divennero un punto di riferimento imprescindibile per chi viaggiava dall'Europa Occidentale verso l'Oriente. La vicenda commerciale delle due città italiane si intersecò ben presto col rapido processo di formazione dell'Impero Mongolo che, a

partire dagli anni Venti del XIII secolo, si estese dalla Cina fino alle porte dell'Europa. La costituzione di un'entità politica omogenea e vastissima facilitò le comunicazioni e in parte le promosse, garantendo ai mercanti occidentali uno spazio più "sicuro" entro il quale muoversi e coprire distanze fino a poco tempo prima inimmaginabili. Negli *emporia* costituiti sul mar Nero e in questo contesto particolare, il ceto mercantile urbano occidentale venne in contatto con l'elemento locale e con gli esponenti dell'emigrazione all'interno di un'area geografica sostanzialmente sconosciuta. Il saggio analizza i rapporti fra veneziani, genovesi e popolazione locale nell'insediamento più orientale di tutto il sistema commerciale latino, Tana sul mar d'Azov in un periodo, il XIV secolo, politicamente ed economicamente assai problematico e per questo particolarmente interessante.

Keywords: Mongol Empire, Mongol Crimea, Venetian Tana, Western merchants.