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## **Slave Trade Networks in the Eastern Mediterranean During the Thirteenth Century: A Historical Overview**

Mohammad Jawad Nazari<sup>1\*</sup> Mohammad Bashir Elham<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Teaching Assistant, History Department, Faculty of Social Science, Bamyan University, Afghanistan

\*Corresponding author Email: [jawadnazari231@gmail.com](mailto:jawadnazari231@gmail.com)

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Eastern Mediterranean (Levant) was at the heart of the medieval commercial network, and the slave trade was one of the most significant aspects of that trade in the thirteenth century CE (seventh century AH). This study discusses the formation of slave-trade networks in the region, the effects of the Fourth Crusade (1204 CE), Mongol invasion, the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and the trading activities of the Italian maritime city-states. The research is conducted by a historical-analytical method, aimed at tracing the changes in the political and economic situation that affected the trade networks in the region based on primary and secondary historical sources. The results of the study suggest that Mongol expansion, Mamluk consolidation and Italian business interests made the slave trade into a major economic enterprise, that shaped the Mediterranean commerce, the course of the Crusades, and the political and trade relations between the city-states of Italy and the Islamic world. Its significance for the economic and political history of the Eastern Mediterranean in the thirteenth century is stressed.

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**KEYWORDS:** Crusades, Levant, Mediterranean, Mongols, Slavery

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The word “Levant” is French for the rising place of the sun - the same word as “East”, which is derived from the Latin word Oriens, meaning the rising place of the sun. In the eyes of the Western Europeans, the term Levant signified the lands bordering the eastern shores of the Mediterranean and in general, the states of Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt. The use of the term western for the East in this situation is an implicit form of interaction and dialogue between the East and West, especially between the Islamic world and Christianity. It has been a (coastal) region of the eastern Mediterranean, where events of global significance have played out in war and culture, as Edward Gibbon, the great historian says, "Ibn Khaldun" (2004).

The present study analyses the factors which contributed to the development of the slave trade in the region of the Levant, especially in the last decades of the Crusades. The Mongol conquest of large tracts of land from China to Europe, and the Mongol government over these areas, created vast linkages between states and regional

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alliances, and therefore a lot of changes to the state and regional relations. This occurred during the times of the Crusades and the Islamic world vs the Christian world. In this context, the economic and political situation during the Crusading period along with the expansion of trade and commerce among the states of the Mediterranean Sea and the domination of the Mongols in the plains of Central Asia and Russia, made the slave trade grow and expand to become one of the most significant economic and commercial activities of the region (Nuwayri, 1984).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The slave trade of the medieval Mediterranean has been the subject of scholarly interest by historians studying changes in the political, economic and social history of the Crusading period. Previous research attempts have focused on various aspects of this phenomenon such as the role of the Crusades, the Mongol expansion, the development of the Mamluk Sultanate, and the Italian maritime republics' commercial activities. But most of these studies have focused on studying these as individual factors, and not as the components of a larger trans regional trading system.

Studies of the Crusades have tended to focus on warfare, religious confrontation, and state-to-state relations between the Christian and Islamic worlds. For detailed studies of the Crusades and their consequences for the politics and economy of the Mediterranean, see Cobb (2014), Runciman (2007), and Groussa (2010). They show that the policies of the Crusader and Muslim states were being shaped by commercial interests, but do not make the slave trade the primary focus of their analyses.

The history of the Mongols has been investigated, and the shift in Eurasian trade after the Mongol conquests is emphasized. The Mongol rule of the Black Sea region and the Eurasian steppe helped spread merchants, goods, and slaves across Central Asia, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, claim Di Cosmo (2005) and Ciocîltan (2012). Likewise, Curta (2008) examines the significance of the commercial routes in the East for the communication of northern Europe with the Mediterranean economy, including the route via Novgorod and Crimea.

The Mamluk Sultanate has been the subject of many works of scholarship. Amitai (2006) or Holt (1991) describe the political and military structure of the Mamluk state as deriving from the steady supply of military slaves, especially from the Kipchak steppe. Most of these studies focus on the institutional dimension of slavery in the Mamluk position, while relatively little attention is paid to the broader commercial networks that provided these slaves (Amitai & Cluse, 2018; Barker, 2019).

Epstein (2007) has discussed the commercial role of the Italian maritime republics and has shown how Venice and Genoa gained a commercial presence in the whole of the eastern Mediterranean, despite religious barriers

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set by the Crusades. He worked to show the relationship between economic interests and religious policies and revealed Italian merchants' involvement in slave markets in the region.

These valuable contributions have not been considered in a single historical context, however, in regard to the slave trade as a whole, that links the Mongols, the Mamluks, the Crusader states, the Byzantine Empire, and the Italian maritime republics. Previously most studies focus on one political entity, one geographical area or one part of the trade. The relationship between political alliances, military clashes and trade interests in the formation of the slave trade networks within the Eastern Mediterranean in the 13th century is thus an area of major research interest (Barker 2019).

The aim of this study is to fill this gap, by using a historical-analytical approach, with a combined political, economic, commercial analysis. It looks at the wider impact of the Crusades, Mongol expansion, Mamluk military policies and the role of the Italian merchant city-states in promoting the growth of slave trade networks and the political and economic dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Thirteenth century.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

In the process of collecting data in this research, it will use a library method and the primary data will be in the form of textbooks and articles published by scholars. For the nature of the research topic, the library method was chosen since it is highly dependent on the study of documents and studies that were based on written and library-based sources. The initial phase of this research has been based on a collection of extensive sources that are considered important for the research topic. After that, critical evaluation of authenticity, validity and reliability of these sources was carried out so that the data obtained were accurate and reliable.

Following the collection of primary materials, a systematic process involving review, synthesis, refinement, and analysis of the information was undertaken. This process included the organization and establishment of logical connections among the various aspects related to the main and subsidiary topics of the research. finally, the findings were interpreted with precision and scholarly analysis in order to provide clear, accurate, and well-substantiated answers to the research questions.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***4.1 Slave Trade in the Levant Region during the Medieval Period up to the Thirteenth Century CE / Seventh Century AH***

In the first half of the Middle Ages (500–1000 CE), Muslim rule in the eastern, southern, and western parts of the Mediterranean Sea was consolidated and strengthened (Burton Adams, 1922; Holt, 1995). Despite the occurrence of wars and naval conflicts between Muslim and Christian states during this period, freedom of

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navigation and the continuity of regional trade largely remained intact (Epstein, 2007). In 212 AH / 827 CE, the establishment of Islamic rule in Sicily marked a new phase in maritime trade between the Islamic and Christian worlds (Burton Adams, 1922). This development led to the formation of extensive commercial relations across the Mediterranean, enabling merchants of different nationalities and religions to engage in the exchange of various goods between the Islamic world and Christian Europe ((E. van, 1991; Brunschwig, 1991).

In the fourth century AH / tenth century CE, the publication of a treatise entitled *Kitab al-Akrit al-Sufun wa al-Niza' baya Ahlaha*, authored by Muhammad in Umar al-Kinani Andalusia al-Iskandarani) containing regulations and rules of navigation, trade, relations between merchants and ship crews, as well as commercial contracts clearly demonstrates the significance of trans regional trade between Muslims and Christians (Amit, 2006).

In 1095 CE, the Crusades motivated by religious, economic, and social factors were initiated following the decree of Pope Urban II (r. 1088–1099 CE) at the Council of Clermont in France, with the objective of capturing Jerusalem. This process continued until 1295 CE / 695 AH, culminating in the withdrawal of the Crusaders from Islamic lands. The First Crusade (1096–1099 CE) proved successful for the Papacy and the Catholic Church, resulting in the conquest of Jerusalem, the establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the occupation of the counties of Odesa and Tripoli. By 1109 CE / 503 AH, the Crusaders had consolidated their presence in these regions and established settlements which have at times been interpreted as early forms of Western European colonialism. Around 1108 CE, Gibert of Nogent described these Crusader bases in the Levant as “new colonies of the sacred Christian dominion” (Holt, 1991).

After the consolidation of Crusader rule in the Levant, the extensive commercial activities of merchants from the Italian city-states placed the region within two large and interconnected regional systems. One of these systems linked Western Europe, Byzantium, and Egypt in the form of a Mediterranean commercial triangle, while the other extended from Europe to the Levant and from there to the Far East and Central Asia. Accordingly, the connection of major ports under Crusader control within the commercial networks of the Levant, the Mediterranean, and Central Asia led to a significant increase in the volume of trade and maritime exchange (E. van, 1991).

Prior to the Crusades, the main source of slave influx into the Mediterranean region was primarily the African continent. During the Crusading period, the trade in slaves from the interior regions of Africa continued, and the Fatimid state of Egypt played an important role in this process. Usama ibn Munqidh, in his account of his journey to Egypt in 539 AH / 1144 CE, refers to black troops, known as al-Sūdān, who constituted part of the Fatimid caliph's elite African military forces. After the fall of the Fatimids, the Ayyubid state, due to ongoing warfare with the Crusaders as well as internal rebellions and insecurity, increasingly expanded the recruitment

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and utilization of slaves. Moreover, the Mongol invasions of Russia and the Kipchak steppe facilitated the large-scale acquisition of slaves from these regions. According to Arab historians, the first Ayyubid sultan, who requested many slaves from the Kipchak steppe and incorporated them into high-ranking positions within his army, established a unit composed of one thousand slaves from this region, known as the Bahri Mamluks. This group formed a loyal military corps that played a decisive role in the Battle of Al-Mansura in 647 AH / 1250 CE, defeating the Crusaders and preventing the occupation of Egypt (In Asir, 2004).

#### ***4.2 Agents of the Slave Trade in the Levant in the Seventh Century AH / Thirteenth Century CE***

The expansion of the slave trade in the Levant during the seventh century AH (thirteenth century CE) was made possible through the interaction of diverse political and commercial actors. States, merchant city republics, traders, and intermediaries each played distinct roles in the capture, transportation, and distribution of enslaved people. This section examines the principal agents involved in these networks and their contributions to the growth of the regional slave trade (Rio, 2017).

##### ***4.2.1 The Role of the Mongols of Rus' in the Slave Trade***

The buying and selling of war captives and their transformation into slaves has a long historical background extending from the Mongolian period to Central Asia. In The Secret History of the Mongols, there is evidence of the prevalence of slavery among the Mongol dynasty. After the Mongol invasions of various territories and their settlement in the Kipchak steppe, this tendency evolved into a large-scale commercial activity involving other states (Roman, 2023).

The Mongol invasions of Rus' and Iran, each carried out in two phases and ultimately leading to the formation of the Mongol states of the Golden Horde and the Khanate in the seventh century AH / thirteenth century CE, brought about extensive political and economic transformations across Central and Western Asia. These developments also resulted in the redirection of overland trade routes linking the Mediterranean to Central Asia. By gaining control over the Caucasus and the Plans, and through the massacre of the Kipchaks, the Mongols engaged in the plundering of wealth and the enslavement of their women (E.van, 1991).

In the second phase of the invasion of Rus', Bat Khan, the son of Jochi, advanced with his forces from Rus' into Eastern Europe and devastated the densely populated and wealthy cities of Kyiv and Ryazan. Following these conquests and large-scale massacres, he settled in the Caucasus and its fertile regions, choosing the city of Sarai on the Volga River as his capital (Groussa, 2010).

From this stage onward, Mongol policy in Rus' shifted, and their focus turned toward expanding trade with the Mediterranean and Europe. During this period, the prosperous commercial city of Novgorod in north-western Ruth' was connected on one side to the Baltic Sea, on another through river networks to the Volga, and also via the Dniro to the Black Sea. In this way, the rulers of the Golden Horde gained control over the trade routes of

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Central Asia, the Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea, integrating them into the commercial networks of the Levant (Hamadani, 2009).

The significance of this lies in the fact that one of the major slave markets was located between Novgorod and the central Volga region (Barker, 2021; Korpela, 2018), which facilitated the transfer of slaves to the southern regions and ultimately to the Levant. The Crimean Peninsula, located to the north of the Black Sea, played an important role as a center for the gathering of various merchants and as a transit hub for goods, including slaves from the Kipchak steppe en route to the Mediterranean. The city of Azov was one of the key ports in this region and served as a place of residence for merchants from different countries, as well as one of the major commercial centers (IbnAlabri, 1994).

Similarly, the port of Kafka, which had been granted to the Genoese by the rulers of the Golden Horde, became one of the most important slave-transfer centers in the Black Sea region. Another commercial city was Sudak (or Soldaia) in southern Crimea. Rubruck also refers to the commercial exchanges of this city with northern regions and to the movement of diverse goods from both the East and the West through it. thus, given the dominance of the khans of the Golden Horde over the northern Caucasus, the eastern and northern coasts of the Black Sea, and the Crimean Peninsula, the ruling states in the Levant placed great importance on maintaining relations with this polity in order to ensure the continuity of slave transfers (Barker, 2021; Grant, 2024). widespread poverty among the population of the Kipchak steppe, which intensified particularly after the Mongol invasions, created additional incentives for Mongol rulers to sell children. Furthermore, the inability of families to pay taxes to the Mongols further stimulated the slave market. In any case, the slave trade constituted an important source of revenue for the rulers of the Golden Horde and strengthened their position in competition with other branches of the Chinggisid dynasty, particularly the Ilkhanids of Iran (Brunschwig, 1991).

#### ***4.3 The Role of the Mamluk State in the Import of Slaves to the Levant***

One of the most important factors in the growth and expansion of the slave trade within the territory of the Golden Horde was the significant increase in demand from the Mamluk state in Egypt. This state relied extensively on slaves imported from the Kipchak steppe and other regions under the influence of the Golden Horde in order to confront the Mongol Khanate in Iran as well as the Crusader states in Syria. The Mamluk state came to power in Egypt in 648 AH / 1250 CE following the collapse of the Ayyubid. The Mamluks rarely referred to their polity as the “Mamluk state” or “state of slaves”; instead, their official designation was al-Dawla al-Turkiyya (the Turkic State). This group was mainly composed of Kipchak Turks (Humans), who were brought as slaves from the Kipchak steppe located between the Eastern European steppes and the Caspian Sea and transported to the ports of the Black Sea and subsequently sold in Egypt (Maqrizi, 1997).

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Accordingly, the political structure of the Mamluk state was based on an army composed of military slaves whose loyalty was directly directed toward the sultan, a ruler who himself emerged from within this same class. Among the prominent rulers of this period was al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars Al-Bunduqdari (r. 659–676 AH / 1260–1277 CE). He was also of Kipchak Turkic origin and had been sold in childhood as a slave to al-Malik al-Şālih, the Ayyubid sultan, where he received military training within a special unit known as the Bahri Mamluks. Baybars later became the principal organizer of the Mamluk army, and during his reign the military forces of the state expanded significantly through the large-scale purchase of slaves. By establishing the mammal-like al-Sultāniyya, which formed the core of the Mamluk army, he further strengthened the direct dependence of the military on the sultan. In later periods, during Ghazan Khan's Ilkhanid campaign toward Damascus, he referred in a derogatory manner to the father of the Sultan of Egypt as a purchased slave (Hamadani, 2009).

One of the main reasons for the rapid and continuous increase in the slave trade from the Mongol territories of the Kipchak steppe to Egypt was the political and military structure of the Mamluk state, particularly the system known as the “one-generation system.” According to this structure, military slaves who rose to high positions of power were not allowed to pass their authority on to their own children. Therefore, in order to maintain its military and political structure, the state was compelled to continuously purchase new young slaves from the Kipchak steppe. As a result, Mamluk society was in a constant process of demographic renewal through the influx of new slaves. Although the descendants of former slaves, known as *awlad al-nas* (“sons of people”), served in subordinate military units, the prevailing view was that they lacked the skills and military qualities of their fathers. In practice, this system created complete dependence of the slaves on the sultan and their military instructors.

Newly arrived slaves in Egypt were not only trained in military skills (*fun al-ḥarb*) but also received religious education, which was one of the key objectives of Mamluk educational institutions. Due to the continuous influx of slaves and the nature of the “one-generation system,” the role and importance of slave merchants increased significantly, and they acquired considerable social and political influence. These merchants held a powerful position in Cairo and Alexandria. Within the administrative structure of the Mamluk state, the office of *mu'allim tujjar Mammal-like* (supervisor of the slave merchants) was established to oversee and regulate the activities of traders working for the sultan (Ciociltan, 2012).

Another important factor in the increased demand for slaves was the presence and power of the Ilkhanids in Iran and their control over Baghdad and Mesopotamia. Conflicts between the Khanate and the Golden Horde, primarily over the territorial claims of the Jochid dynasty in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan, as well as hostility toward the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria, led to the formation of the Sarai Cairo political axis against Tabriz.

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This axis persisted, with some fluctuations, until the end of the Ilkhanid period and pursued two main objectives: one political and the other economic, particularly the export of slaves from the Golden Horde to Egypt. In this context, Cairo placed the greatest emphasis on securing slaves through its relations with the Golden Horde, especially after the Ilkhanid attacks on Syria, which had weakened Egypt's military capacity. (Burton, 1922).

An alliance between the Mamluks and the Golden Horde against the Ilkhanids was formed during the reign of al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars. In 661 AH / 1262 CE, the two powers formally declared their alliance against the "infidel Kulak" through the exchange of ambassadors and official gifts (Maqrizi, 1997).

However, the most important challenge faced by the Mamluk state in the slave trade was its lack of direct control over the main routes of slave transfer from the source regions. As a result, the state became heavily dependent on external intermediaries both on land and at sea, and it continuously sought to secure safer routes for access to the slave trade. The main maritime route passed through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, which were under the control of the Byzantine Empire. Although the Byzantines did not obstruct the flow of the slave trade (Roman, 2009, 2023), they pursued a dual policy aimed at maintaining relations with all three powers: the Golden Horde, the Khanate, and the Mamluks. In the treaty of 680 AH / 1281 CE between Michael VII Palaiologos and Sultan Qalawun, the Byzantine emperor committed himself to ensuring the secure transfer of slaves (on the condition that no Christian captives were included among them). He guaranteed the safe passage of such transports (In Furat, 1936). Likewise, in 684 AH / 1285 CE, Qalawun concluded a similar agreement with the King of Armenia, emphasizing the free movement of slaves, horses, and mules (Holt, 1991).

In addition to the maritime route, two overland routes also existed: one from eastern Anatolia and the other through the territory of the Khanate, both of which, due to the dominance of the Khanate, were in practice unusable for the Mamluk Sultanate. In the year 690 AH / 1291 CE, the Mamluks succeeded in capturing Acre, the last major stronghold of the Crusaders in the Levant. This victory led to the consolidation of Mamluk supremacy in the region. Since the Crusaders had played a significant role in long-distance trade networks, their (fall) brought about fundamental changes in the structure of trade from Asia to the Levant. As a result, many European merchants, who found commercial activity in the Mediterranean Sea increasingly difficult, turned instead to the Black Sea. This shift in routes led to a significant increase in the transfer of slaves from the Black Sea region to various areas, including the Levant (Ciociltan, 2012).

#### ***4.4 The Role of the Italian City-States in the Slave Trade***

During the Middle Ages, the Italian city-states, particularly Venice and Geno, enjoyed extensive and prominent privileges in the sphere of trade in the Levant. In the course of the Crusades, the position and significance of these city-states increased considerably. The importance of their role can be examined along two principal axes:

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First: From the very outset of their movement, the Crusaders were fundamentally dependent upon maritime power. In the First Crusade, Pope Urban II personally requested the Genoese to provide a naval fleet in support of the Crusaders. The Genoese fleet, together with English and Byzantine Empire ships, played a decisive role in the military success of the Crusaders. Furthermore, the campaign of Frederick Barbarossa during the Third Crusade constituted the last serious attempt to gain overland access to the Holy Land. After the Third Crusade, the maritime route remained the sole line of communication with the Levant and the Holy Land, and even the transport of horses required complex naval planning and logistics.

An important consequence of this intense dependence on maritime power was that the Italian city-states acquired extensive and exceptional privileges. In this regard, a fundamental point is that the Islamic world, due to geographical conditions and the scarcity of suitable timber resources for the construction of large ships, did not possess a strong and competitive naval force. Ibn Khaldun also referred to the weakness of Muslim naval power in comparison with European powers during the Crusades (In Khaldun, 2005).

Second: The relations of the Italian city-states with the Islamic world, in comparison with other Christian states and peoples, were characterized by less tension and a more amicable nature. Their relations with the Mongols of Russia and Iran, the Byzantine Empire, Armenia, as well as the Mamluk Sultanate, all of whom were regarded as principal actors in the trade of the Levant, particularly the slave trade, were predominantly based on economic and commercial interests.

During the period of the Crusades, the Levant effectively functioned as the hinterland of the state of Venice (Barker, 2019). Many Venetians, especially merchant families, settled permanently in the Levant and established their commercial centers there. Bar Heraeus estimates the population of Venetians residing in the commercial regions of the Byzantine domains in 1171 CE at approximately 20,000 individuals, of whom 10,000 were settled in Constantinople (E.van, 1991).

During the First Crusade, at a time when religious fervor had spread throughout Europe, Venice adopted a pragmatic approach grounded in economic interests. The Venetian state waited until the news of the conquest of Jerusalem was announced, and only then dispatched a fleet accompanied by auxiliary forces to the region. They regarded the capture of Jerusalem as the beginning of their commercial dominance over the East, and for this reason welcomed the success of the Crusaders. Venice's commercial policy in the profitable slave trade in the Levant continued throughout the Crusading period and, at certain times, even expanded further. This was despite the fact that Venice effectively stood alongside the Crusaders and was aware of the consequences of strengthening their adversaries, particularly the Ayyubid dynasty and subsequently, the Mamluk Sultanate, whose political and military systems were based on the continuous importation of young slaves. Nevertheless,

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due to economic interests, this city-state disregarded religious constraints and did not refrain even from the trade of Christian slaves within Europe and the Mediterranean Sea.

The Fourth Crusade represents the apex of Venetian political maneuvering and economic pragmatism. This campaign, which even led to conflict among Christians themselves, could not have succeeded without the support of the Venetian fleet, as the weakness of the Byzantine Empire had rendered the use of overland routes impossible. In 1201 CE / 598 AH, the Crusaders entered into negotiations with Venice and concluded an agreement for the transportation of troops, equipment, and horses by the Venetians in exchange for extensive concessions, including a share in the conquests. At the same time, Venetian representatives in Cairo were engaged in negotiating a commercial treaty with the state of Egypt, which was signed in 1202 CE / 599 AH, wherein Venice committed itself not to participate in an attack on Egypt (Burton, 1922).

However, this war, instead of attacking Muslims, led to the capture of Zara (Adriatic port) and then Constantinople and the establishment of the Latin state alongside the Bosphorus. Many historians consider this event as a result of the deviation of the war's objective and the deceptive role of the Venetians. Ibn al-Athir also provides detailed reports of the widespread plunder and killing in Constantinople (In Asir, 2004).

One of the most important results of this war for Venice was the capture of the island of Crete in the Aegean Sea. This island, with a population of about 500 to 600 thousand people, was located on the trade route of Egypt and Syria and functioned as an important commercial station and a center for the transfer of slaves. The capture of Crete meant the retreat of Venice's long-standing rival, Genoa, from the maritime trade of the Levant. Thus, Venice gained control over most of the eastern Mediterranean until the mid-thirteenth century, and even the Black Sea in a way turned into a "Venetian lake" (Cobb, 2014).

However, Genoa, in the second half of the thirteenth century, especially in the late Crusades, managed to restore its position in the markets of the Black Sea and the ports of Crimea. They expanded their economic influence by establishing commercial colonies in coastal cities under the rule of the Golden Horde and in Byzantine ports. The famous Treaty of Nymphaeum in 1261 CE / 660 AH, between Emperor Michael VII and the Republic of Genoa, strengthened the position of this city-state in the Levant. As a result, Genoa played an active role in trade relations with the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanids (Barker, 2021; King, 2004) and at the same time established extensive diplomatic relations with the Mamluks.

During this period, Genoa succeeded in pushing Venice back from parts of the Black Sea and gained control over the trade routes of Central Asia. They also took control of the profitable slave trade between the Kipchak steppe and Mamluk Egypt and became one of the main actors in this economic network (Curta, 2008).

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#### ***4.5 The impact of the slave trade on the societies involved in the Crusades in the Mediterranean and the Levant***

The expansion of the slave trade during the Crusading period had profound social, political, and economic consequences for the societies of the Mediterranean and the Levant. Beyond its commercial significance, the movement of enslaved people influenced demographic structures, cultural interactions, and relations between Muslim and Christian communities. This section examines these impacts by focusing on the Mamluk Sultanate, Mediterranean European societies, and the religious tensions that emerged within the Christian world (Favreau, 2021).

##### ***4.5.1 Impact on Mamluk Egypt***

The state and society of Mamluk Egypt were affected in various ways by this extensive and highly profitable trade. The slaves brought from the Kipchak steppe transferred part of the culture and heritage of their homeland to Egyptian society and carried with them narratives and stories from their original birthplace to this land; these accounts are also reflected in some Mamluk-period sources. Ibn Taghribirdi, in describing the rule of Malik Cahir Baybars, based on reports about how he was captured and the route of his transfer from the Kipchak steppe to Egypt, provides valuable information about the condition of the Cuman peoples in the Kipchak steppe and their transfer to Egypt (In Furat, 1936).

One of the important social consequences of the slave trade in Egypt was the arrival of diverse ethnic groups and the formation of a multi-ethnic society among the slaves. The two dominant groups among these slaves were the Turks and Circassians.

During a significant transformation in the route of slave importation from the Kipchak steppe, the ethnic composition within the structure of the Mamluk Sultanate also changed. This transformation began when the sharp increase in the purchase of slaves from the Kipchak steppe led to a population decline in that region; especially since the Mamluk system of “single generation” required that young slaves, both boys and girls, be purchased before reaching puberty, which contributed to the population decrease in the Kipchak steppe. Another factor was the conversion of many of them to Islam, which, according to Islamic law, restricted or prohibited their resale (Rose, 2021).

As a result, the Mamluk state found an alternative source of slaves, and from that time onward, the Circassians replaced the Kipchaks. The large influx of Circassians into Egypt brought profound social, political, and military changes to the Mamluk structure. During the reign of Mansour Qalawun, a new military unit of Circassians called the “Burri” was formed, which was the first sign of internal rivalry and a shift in the balance of power within the Mamluk army (Holt, 1991).

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As a result, a multi-ethnic society emerged in which the marriage of slaves was also conducted under specific rules. Male slaves usually married female slaves of their own ethnic group or daughters of other slaves. Marriages between Mamluk emirs and free Egyptian women, especially the daughters of nobles or scholars, were very limited and rare. This situation itself led to an increased demand for slave imports and the continuous arrival of slave girls from various regions. Furthermore, in-group marriages and the dominance of the Turkish language among the slaves, while they lived in the Arabic-speaking environment of Egypt, caused them, in times of crisis, to become a potential force for social unrest. Urban rebellions in Cairo were often accompanied by shortages of food and social instability, and in this context slaves also participated in the conflicts (Maqrizi, 1997).

#### ***4.5.2 Impact on European societies of the Mediterranean region***

One of the important consequences of the slave trade in Europe was the formation of a form of sexual slavery and the emergence of early patterns of sex trade in the West. This process led not only states such as Venice and Genoa, but also independent merchants and even non-merchant individuals to participate in the sale of women and girls for Mediterranean markets and for domestic service among the wealthy classes. According to historical reports, the main purpose of the slave trade in Europe was primarily domestic use and sexual exploitation (Di Cosmo, 2005).

Venetian merchants divided Slavic, Georgian, and Circassian slaves in the ports of Crimea and sold the women to buyers in Western Europe. Female slaves were also employed within Venetian society itself. Commercial records and account books show that most of the slaves entering Venice were girls aged between 14 and 30, and their physical characteristics were carefully recorded in official registers (Epstein, 2007).

The large-scale arrival of these women in Europe had significant social consequences (Barker, 2019; Roku, 2021). On one hand, their attractiveness as non-Christians and “religious outsiders” conflicted with religious teachings and papal decrees prohibiting relations with enemies of the faith. On the other hand, if these slaves converted to Christianity, a new legal issue arose, since the popes had forbidden the buying and keeping of Christian slaves. As a result, a conflict emerged between economics and religion. In 1237 CE, Pope Gregory IX issued a decree allowing the baptism of slaves but denying their freedom afterward. Genoese records also show that some slaves had been converted to Christianity, although the exact circumstances of their conversion are unclear. The widespread presence of these slaves led to demographic changes in major European cities such as Venice, Florence, Genoa, Naples, and Palermo, where they constituted about 4 to 10 percent of the population. Even linguistic traces of this presence remain, as names of peoples such as the Humans appear in many regions of Europe as surnames or titles (Runciman, 2007).

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#### ***4.5.3 The Impact of the Slave Trade on the Intensification of Religious Conflicts in the Christian World***

The Crusades, relations between the two main branches of Christianity, namely the Orthodox Church of Constantinople and the Roman Catholic Church, experienced a deep divide and increasing tensions. These disputes reached their peak during the Fourth Crusade, when Latin forces not only attacked Constantinople but also plundered it. However, one important and less discussed factor in deepening this divide was the enslavement of Orthodox Christians by Latin merchants a phenomenon that significantly affected relations between Byzantium and Western Europe and widened the gap between these two Christian worlds. In this context, Venetian and Genoese merchants played an active role. On the other hand, the papal authorities attempted to restrict or halt trade with Muslims. In 1198 CE, Pope Innocent II issued a decree prohibiting the Venetians from trading with Muslims. However, due to the Venetians' dependence on trade and their inability to engage in agriculture, some commercial exchanges except for prohibited goods were tolerated.

Despite these restrictions, the naval powers and merchants of the Italian city-states, in order to offset papal pressure, expanded the slave trade to other regions, including Orthodox communities. The argument consistently raised by the Venetians and Genoese against the Church was that these bans harmed the economy of the Crusaders and the Latin Christian world more than they harmed the Muslims (Epstein, 2007).

Prohibition of trade with Muslims, as well as restrictions on trade among co-religionists, led to widespread religious tensions and the search for alternative ways to preserve the most profitable sector of the Crusader-era economy. One of these solutions was the extensive use of Jewish merchants. The Jews, who themselves played a prominent role in economic and commercial activities, gradually became one of the most active groups in the slave trade in the Levant. They controlled the markets of Crimea and transferred slaves to Europe and the Mediterranean regions. Later, even the papal authorities, under economic pressure and the policies of the Italian city-states, granted limited permissions for the trade of certain "heretical" Christian slaves. In the fifteenth century CE, Protaphor, a Spanish traveler and writer, reported on his journeys to the Levant and Constantinople about the continuation of the Christian slave trade. During his visit to the slave market of Jaffa in Crimea, he observed that Christians possessed papal authorization allowing them to buy and keep slaves from Russian, Circassian, Armenian, Caucasian, Bulgarian, and other groups, in order to prevent them from falling into Muslim hands. In practice, this situation facilitated the activities of Italian and Jewish merchants in this trade. As a result, conflicts between the Church and Italian merchants formed around two main axes: first, the prohibition of the slave trade towards Muslims, especially the Mamluks, aimed at preventing the buying and selling of Christian slaves. However, Italian merchants effectively bypassed both restrictions (Epstein, 2007).

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Historical sources of the period mention a famous Genoese merchant named Sigourano Salvaygo, who, contrary to Church policy and religious considerations, transferred thousands of slaves to Egypt. There are even reports that he and his family sold around 10,000 slaves to the Mamluks; as a result, in Islamic sources, Genoese merchants were sometimes referred to as “child thieves” in the Kipchak lands (Ciociltan, 2012).

Information regarding his role in this trade is also reflected, in addition to the works of historians, in the reports of William Adam, Archbishop of Sultania during the reign of Arghun. William Adam, a knowledgeable Dominican cleric, after traveling to Egypt and parts of the Levant, analyzed the relations between Christians and Muslims. His main aim was to weaken the power of Muslims and to pave the way for a new Crusade. In his report to the Pope, the transfer of young slaves to Egypt is mainly presented with negative moral motives and sexual purposes. However, his main anger was directed at Genoese merchants, especially Segura no Salvaygo. He portrayed this merchant as a supporter of Muslims and, upon seeing his ships in Alexandria operating under the Mamluk flag, accused him of treason against the Christian world. In his view, these individuals were transporting prohibited goods to the enemies of Christianity (Rio, 2017; Lenski, 2021).

He even proposed to the Pope that Christians, in cooperation with Iran, should establish independent maritime routes to the Indian Ocean in order to break the trade monopoly of the Mamluks, the Russian Mongols, and the accused Christian merchants. In his view, although the Ilkhanid state itself was Muslim, it could still serve as a suitable economic partner for breaking Egypt’s monopoly over eastern trade. Thus, William Adam, who himself lived in the Ilkhanid realm, collected political and economic information in a rather precise and purposeful manner (Epstein, 2007).

Despite the end of the Crusades, religious disputes surrounding the slave trade continued, and Italian merchants maintained their profitable activities. On the other hand, the Crusades themselves also influenced this trade; as military operations became increasingly dependent on naval power, the role of Italian fleets expanded, and consequently they gained greater control over the slave trade routes (Runciman, 2007).

Moreover, battles and the conquest of cities during the Crusades had temporary but significant effects on the supply and demand of slaves. For example, after the Battle of Hattin, the large influx of prisoners of war into the slave markets of the Levant led to a sharp decline in slave prices, as the oversupply forced merchants to sell at lower prices (Cobb, 2014).

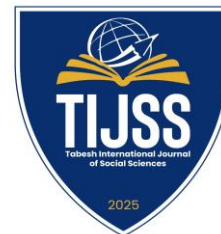
The capture of Constantinople in 1204 CE had a similar effect (Grant, 2024). With the fall of the city, many captives were transferred to slave markets, which caused a drop in slave prices in the Levant. During this period, many Christian families also fell into poverty and economic hardship due to paying ransoms for the release of their relatives. This process was repeated after the fall of Antioch in 1268 CE and the renewed influx of thousands of Christian slaves into the Levantine markets (DiCosmo, 2005).

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## CONCLUSION

In general, it can be said that the Crusades in the twelfth century CE / sixth century AH played a highly important and decisive role in shaping and expanding relations between East and West, especially across the Mediterranean and the Levant. With the establishment of Crusader forces in these regions, a wide wave of migration, occupation, population displacement, and settlement of Christians in the eastern lands was set in motion. Alongside military conflicts, peace treaties and truces also facilitated the expansion of relations between Muslims and Christians, leading to significant growth in trade and commercial activities, which were among the main pillars of these relations. At the beginning of the thirteenth century CE / seventh century AH, the large-scale and devastating Mongol invasions of Central Asia, Russia, and Iran, and their domination over the vast plains of Russia up to the northern shores of the Black Sea, brought profound political and economic transformations. These developments directly increased the transfer of slaves to the Levant, the Mediterranean region, and even parts of Europe.

Furthermore, the emergence of both cooperation and political rivalry between branches of the Jochid lineage in Russia and the Mamluk state in Egypt turned the trade routes of slaves from the Kipchak steppe and the Black Sea into a focal point of political alliances, conflicts, and religious tensions, an issue that had wide-ranging effects on the Crusades and the states involved. In this context, Italian merchant city-states such as Venice and Genoa, adopting a pragmatic and profit-oriented approach, managed to establish political and commercial relations with all parties involved in the Crusades. These city-states effectively became the main actors in the slave trade, playing a crucial role in transferring thousands of slaves from the territories of the Golden Horde to Mamluk Egypt, Italian lands, and other parts of Europe. The increasing influx of slaves into the Levant and the Mediterranean had deep and far-reaching consequences for the social and political structures of these regions and simultaneously intensified religious tensions within the Christian world. These conflicts mainly arose from the Church's opposition to the participation of Christian merchants in the slave trade and the transfer of slaves to Muslim lands, especially the strengthening of the Mamluk state on the one hand and the sale of Christian slaves by these same merchants on the other. In contrast, the Mamluk state, due to its military and political structure, was heavily dependent on importing slaves from the Golden Horde for workforce and, accordingly, regarded maintaining relations and alliances with this state as a fundamental principle of its foreign policy. On the other hand, the shared hostility of the Mamluk state and the Golden Horde toward the Ilkhanid Mongols contributed to the strengthening of their alliance and the expansion of trade networks between them. This situation, combined with political and economic rivalries, increasingly drew the Christian world and the Italian city-states into a sphere of alliances, competition, and regional conflicts, allowing them to exploit these dynamics for expanding political influence, religious presence, and economic gain.



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### **5.1 Suggestions and Recommendations**

1. Historical studies concerning the Levant and the Mediterranean should adopt a more interdisciplinary approach by integrating political, economic, and social dimensions in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the slave trade and its regional impacts.
2. Greater scholarly attention should be devoted to the role of commercial networks and merchant city-states in shaping political alliances and economic relations during the Crusading and Mongol periods.
3. Academic institutions and researchers are encouraged to expand comparative studies concerning the interaction between the Islamic and Christian worlds and the influence of commerce on diplomatic and military relations.
4. Researchers should make wider use of multilingual primary sources, including Arabic, Latin, and European chronicles, to achieve a more balanced interpretation of historical developments.
5. Further analytical research is recommended on the economic motivations behind the involvement of Italian merchant city-states in the slave trade and their relations with both Crusader and Islamic powers.
6. Educational and research centers may consider developing specialized studies on the long-term social and political consequences of slave movements in the Levant and Mediterranean regions.

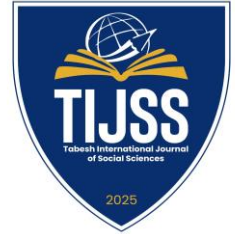
### **5.2 Suggestions for Further Research**

1. Future research may investigate the comparative role of different Mediterranean commercial centers in facilitating and controlling the slave trade during the Crusading era.
2. Further studies could examine the social and demographic effects of slave transfers on the Levant, Mamluk Egypt, and European societies.
3. Researchers are encouraged to explore the diplomatic and military dimensions of alliances between the Mamluk state, the Golden Horde, and European powers and their relationship to commercial exchanges and regional conflicts.

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