

Mobility, Tributes and the Foundations of Qubilai's Diplomacy – The Annam Example

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Mobility was a fundamental element of Yuan diplomatic practice, which involved the flow of people (envoys, hostages, kings, etc.) and goods (tributes and presents) from and to the Imperial court. As the participation to these conditions by foreign rulers was crucial for Yuan legitimation, the sources - and in particular the *Yuanshi* chapters on foreign lands (*waiyi*) - devote much attention to these diplomatic exchanges, as well as to the cultural and strategic misunderstandings connected to them.

An interesting example is the difficult relation with the reign of Annam, whose disloyalty is in fact represented by the king's unwillingness to such diplomatic mobility. The account on this matter in the *Yuanshi* (*juan* 209) provides therefore detailed information about the goods, the routes and the individuals involved in Yuan diplomacy with the South. Taking this source as a case study, the paper analyses the practical details and the ideological implications of Qubilai's diplomatic protocol. In particular the importance given by the Mongol Emperor to tributes, which in different sources has been alternately interpreted as an interest for trade or simply described as greed, will be analyzed in the broader context of Central Asian tradition and political ideology. Through a comparisons with similar examples from the Mongol Empire and beyond, the paper will show that Qubilai's attention to "appropriate tributes" was not simply a matter of economic interest, but was instead deliberately connected to a more complex Central Asian ideology of sacral kingship and political legitimation.