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Western Missionaries and Merchants: An Example of Cooperation and Sharing of Common Interests in the Mongol Empire

One can hardly find a coincidence that European missionary “expansion” in the Mongol Empire coincided with the most favorable period for the development of Italian trade in the East in the first half of the 14th century. As will be shown in this paper, the Franciscan Oriental apostolate experienced its heyday roughly during the reign of the Golden Horde khan Uzbek (1313–1341), although the activities of Western missionaries affected in a large extent the rest of the uluses of the Mongol Empire. In this paper, however, I do not discuss the details of development of the Latin missionary work, but I focus on invaluable financial support of Italian merchants, without which the missionary activity of Mendicants could hardly achieve such an unprecedented scale. In addition, I will try to clarify the reasons of Italian merchants who sacrificed significant amounts of money to support the activities of Western missionaries. I will also try to explain the reason for the special favor of the Mongol rulers, which they showed towards missionaries from Europe.

So I will try to prove that the presence of Western missionaries in the East proved beneficial both for Italian merchants and the Mongol rulers. And with this consideration one can explain the wide spread of Franciscan convents in the vast Mongol Empire.