

Movement on the Ayas-Tabriz road from the mid-1250s to 1337 A.D.: products, coin and metal, and the growth of cities

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The well-known itinerary of Il-Khanid tax stations between the port of Ayas in Cilicia and Tabriz featuring in the trade manual of the Florentine banker Pegolotti was compiled probably in the early or mid-1320s. Identification of all the tax stations has made it easier to analyse the nature of trade and movement along this route, as has the collation of the evidence for the Italian merchant communities in Sivas and Tabriz.

A comparison of goods available at Tabriz and those available at Ayas allows us to gain a reasonable estimate of the nature of trade flows along the road. The goods, principally from the Persian Gulf, the Indies and perhaps even from further east, which travelled down the road to Ayas consisted mainly of high-value, light products: silk, spices and pearls. The European goods unloaded at Ayas and taken up the road to Sivas and Tabriz were by comparison fewer and heavier: cloth, tin and copper, for example.

This created a balance of payments deficit which in turn led to a net flow of precious metal, sometimes in the form of ingots, up the road. Il-Khanid minting along the road seems to reflect the volume of trading activity at given centres such as Sivas and Tabriz.

The effect of the trade was momentous: the five cities along the road grew at a pace which fully parallels the speed of growth in contemporary Italian cities and elsewhere in Europe.