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The Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia
in the System of Mediterranean Trade
(13th – 14th cc.)

The perception of the science of history, its evaluation, acknowledgment as well as various possible formulations have subjected to changes throughout centuries and millennia.

The classical composition of history where the lion's share belonged to the pure political history (countries, wars, kings, etc.) underwent content and worldview transformations especially in the 20th century. New schools of historical science emerged (Annales School, etc.) the representatives of which accepted the everyday activities, lifestyle, social and economic life of ordinary people as their subject of study.

The Mediterranean sea has always been one of the cradles of the structural development of world economy which gave birth to the ancient maritime civilizations of the Phoenicians, Ancient Greek, Roman etc.

The 13th – 14th centuries are one of the crucial stages of the history of Mediterranean trade system when unprecedented economic transformations processed in Western Europe which were expressed not only by the development of entrepreneurial production but by a completely new quality of financial-monetary relations. As a result the interaction of economy-politics was expressed by a more complex structure. The Italian republics (Venice, Genoa, Pisa, etc.) which were the main leaders of the Mediterranean trade already in the 13th c. directly involved in the Crusades, expanded their oversea economic and political activities through a skillful strategy worked out and developed over the centuries. Moreover, the first banks were formed in the 12th c. especially in the Italian towns, which invested enormous financial means in the international sphere of trade. At the same time the Near Eastern and North African countries gradually sank into the economic crisis. The dependence of the latter to the commerce with the South European countries was getting more noticeable which could not certainly stand apart from influencing on their foreign politics.

Thus, in the conditions of the situation of world politics formed by these new factors the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia from the beginning of the 13th c. started to get involved in the Mediterranean

trade, the most developed economic system for that certain period of time. The Cilician Armenia obtained completely new partners in the international relations such as the Western European trading great powers. Henceforth, the Armenian kingdom appeared to be in a sphere of world politics of a more extensive structure. The trade provided enormous profits for the state treasury of Cilicia, promoted the economic development and gradually became one of the priority issues of the country's foreign policy agenda.

The subject of the study which almost involves two centuries is one of the unique and extraordinary stages of time period when the Armenian reality became a full member of the Mediterranean big family. The European merchants hosted by almost all of the big cities of Cilicia as well as in the capital of Sis were numbered in hundreds.

The Armenian man lived in the conditions of exclusive, cosmopolitan reality, where on the same street there settled the Venetian, Genoese, French, Catalonian, Jew, Arab, Greek, etc. The commercial activities of the latter, the characteristics of community life and the study of other issues have special importance from the perspective of the elucidation of the history of everyday life in the Cilician towns. Meanwhile, the study of the international trade enables to present the political history of Cilician Armenia in a more

comprehensive and complete way. The geographic favorable conditions were one of the most essential factors of Cilician Armenia to be involved in the international trade. Besides, in the 13th – 14th cc. Cilicia was situated in the terrestrial net of highways of the Near East. By its developed agriculture and crafts Cilician Armenia presented itself to the international trade by various local quality products which were popular in many distant countries.

The main ways of the organization of the Mediterranean trade of the 13th – 14th cc. were widely spread in Cilician Armenia. Besides various bargains and loans the monetary transfers were generally applied as a rule which were realized by Cilicia on one hand and by the Eastern Mediterranean and South European towns on the other hand. One of the most important factors which promoted the development of international trade in Cilician Armenia was the effective tax policy. The state had the necessary institutions and infrastructures for tax collection. The low customs and safety guarantees set up by the Armenian kings created attractive conditions for the foreign merchants. From the very beginning of the 13th c. first communities of foreign merchants settled in Cilician towns. If the affairs of Venice and Genoa in the Eastern Mediterranean were firstly controlled by the representative bodies founded in the Crusaders'

towns then beginning from the 1270's separate consulates were nominated for Cilician Armenia. Unlike the European merchants whose various types of agreements were formulated by their Notary agents and sent to the European archives, the Armenians, even if they had such kind of practices, not a document of this type has reached us. Nevertheless, the facts show that the main spheres of the activities of the Armenian merchants were on one hand the trade of passing through Ayas-Tabriz and on the other hand the commercial intermediation between the Mamluks and the Europeans.

While examining the turning political events of the 13th – 14th cc. in Europe and the East as well as the chronological data of the signature of the international commercial contracts of Cilician Armenia the high level of their concordance at once attracts one's attention. Usually each significant political change was immediately followed by a signature of commercial agreements with Venice, Genoa or other European states. That allows to state that the factor of the economic profit based on the international trade had a priority importance for the foreign policy of Cilician Armenia.

The essential issues related to the international trade of Cilician Armenia is for the first time elucidated in this book based on the analysis of various sources and scientific studies.

For instance, the process of involvement of Cilician Armenia in the international trade is subjected to periodization. The examination of the composition of the variety of goods, the commercial ties of the Cilician harbours and the ways of the organization of trade has enabled to reveal the significance of Cilician Armenia in the financial-economic system formed in the Mediterranean basin in the period under discussion. By the analysis of the decisive events of the world politics which took place in the Near East and Europe as well as the international economic relation development process the degree of the interactions has been studied which allowed to present various issues of the political history of Cilician Armenia in a more comprehensive way.