

The Envoy to Pope Benedict XII by the Great Khan in 1336

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The expedition of the embassy to Avignon by the Great Khan

In 1328 John of Montecorvino, the first archbishop of Beijing, died in Beijing. The news of his death arrived late to Avignon in 1333. Pope John XXII decided to send a new archbishop to Beijing, addressing letters to Mongol Khans. The Pope dispatched the new archbishop, Nicholas of Botras¹, who was given the task of delivering the letter and replacing the late Monte Corvino. Nicholas, a member of the Franciscan order, headed for Beijing accompanied by twenty friars and six laymen.² But the envoys would not succeed in arriving to their final destination.³

Knowing that the second archbishop of Beijing failed to come to Beijing, in 1336 the great Khan Toghon Temür (1333-1368) sent an embassy to Pope Benedict XII in Avignon. The embassy took two letters to Avignon and presented them to the Pope.⁴ In his letter to Pope Benedict XII⁵, the great Khan requested the Pope to have frequent diplomatic exchanges between

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¹ He was a professor of theology at Paris. John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, eds., *Trade, travel, and exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 15-16.

² Eubel, *Bullarium franciscanum*, no.1057 (Nicolao archiepiscopo Cambalien. concedit facultatem assumendi secumque ad ecclesiam suam adducendi 20 clericos et 6 laicos fratres ord. Min. 1334, february 13, Avinione); Charles Raymond Beazley, *The dawn of modern geography: a history of exploration and geographical science* (Oxford, 1906), III, 181-182.

³ Chiefs of the Alans say in their letter to Pope Benedict XII that “although we have heard that you have provided for another legate, he however is not yet come.” A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1500* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), p.253.

⁴ Pope Benedict XII ordered the translation of these letters into Latin in 1338 and these letters were translated again into French by a friar of Saint Bertin. M. E. Jacquet, “Notes sur quelques relations diplomatiques des Mongols de la Chine avec les Papes d’Avignon”, *Journal Asiatique*, tome 7(1831), pp.417-433; Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.187; Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Chi era Andrea Franco?”, *Atti della societa Ligure di storia patria*, vol.17 (1979), pp.371-377.

⁵ G. Daumet (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes, patentes et curiales se rapportant à la France* (Paris, 1899-1920), col.337, no.550. <In fortitudine omnipotentis Dei Imperatoris Imperatorum preceptum. Nos mittimus nuncium nostrum Andream Francum cum quindecim sociis ad papam dominum christianorum in Franckiam ultra septem maria ubi sol occidit, ad aperiendum viam nunciis sepe mittendis per nos ad papam ut mittat nobis suam benedictionem et in orationibus suis sanctis semper memoriam faciat de nobis, et quod Alanos servitors nostros filios suos christianos habeat recommendatos; item quod adducent nobis ab occasu solis equos et alia mirabilia-scripta in Cambalec, in anno rati, mense sexto, tercia die lunationis.>

Avignon and Beijing, to send him his blessing, and to remember him in his prayers. The other letter was sent to Pope Benedict XII by chiefs of the Alans.

Having arrived at Avignon about on 31 May 1338, this embassy was received with great honors by Pope Benedict XII. On 13 June 1338, Pope Benedict XII composed letters to the Great Khan⁶, other khans and chiefs of the Alans, promising that he would send a new archbishop of Beijing.⁷ After three weeks in Avignon, the embassy went to Genoa and wintered there. Leaving Genoa, the embassy arrived at Naples where they met the papal envoy appointed by Pope Benedict XII on 28 March 1339. The papal envoy consisted of a group of Minorites led by Nicholas Bonet and John of Marignolli. Having visited the lands of the Franks 'beyond the seven seas and setting sun' and procured procure horses and other marvels requested by the Great Khan, the Mongol envoy returned to Beijing. The embassy of the great Khan and the papal envoy finally arrived at Beijing, probably in the late spring or early summer of 1342 in that they met the great khan on 19 August 1342.⁸

Historiography

This Mongol envoy itself has been studied by several historians.⁹ However, there still remains a debate about several aspects of the embassy. Historians have been focused on one person, Andalo da Savignone and his identity. Many historians suggest that he was a merchant of Genoa and a leader of the envoy.¹⁰ On the contrary, other members of this diplomatic and religious embassy have been less studied. Not limiting our attention to the person of Andalo da Savignone, this article will extend the scope of the investigation towards those who participated in the embassy sent to Avignon by the Great Khan in 1336. For this purpose, we should inevitably

⁶ Imperatori imperatorum Tartarorum gratias agit de nuntiis et litteris ab ipso missis, necnon de favoribus et gratis quas nobilibus viris Fodim Jovens, Chryansam Tongi, Chembogae Veusy, Joanni Yochoy, et Rubeo Pinzano, principibus Alanorm Christicolis, in suo imperio degentibus, praestat; ipsum que hortatur ut benevolentiam suam erga illos continuare velit, et antistites ac religiosos catholicos, ecclesias et oratoria eorum protection sua foveat, verbum quoque Dei permittat in imperio suo praedicari; deinceps nuntios apostolicos ad suam praesentiam destinandos benigne recipiat et audiat. J. M. Vidal (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes et patentes intéressantes les pays autres que la France* (Paris, 1913-1950), col.542, no.1865.

⁷ Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Chi era Andrea Franco?", *Atti della società Ligure di storia patria*, vol.17 (1979), pp.371-372; Giovanni Soranzo, *Il papato, l'Europa Cristiana e i Tartari: un secolo di penetrazione occidentale in Asia* (Milano: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1930), p. 535.

⁸ Horses from the west, often described in China in 'blood-sweating horses' or as 'heavenly steeds', were much larger and stronger than local breeds, and were especially prized gifts. The horse was celebrated in verses written in its honor by the imperial court poets, and commemorated in a portrait which survived until the early nineteenth century. Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.193; J. R. S. Phillips, *The medieval expansion of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.104.

survey two groups, that is, Genoese merchants and the Alans. We will focus particularly on Genoese merchants that have played a major role in the diplomatic exchange between the Great Khan and the Papacy.

The Alans converted to Catholicism by Montecorvino

There has been much discussion on the purpose of the envoy sent to Avignon by the great khan. It is argued that he wished to obtain horses and other marvelous things (*alia mirabilia*). Bigger and stronger European horses have been well known to the Mongol courts, compared to small Mongol horses even with physical endurance. In fact, Toghon Temür was so pleased to receive war horses as presents from the Pope in 1342 that he ordered the court painter Chou Lang to make a portrait of the horse and the renowned poet Ou-yang Hsüan to compose a poem to celebrate this gift.¹¹ Marignolli of the Papal envoy describes this event as follows: “the great khan, when he saw the war horses and the Pope’s presents and the sealed letter and king Robert’s too with the gold and us, rejoiced with great joy, thinking all very good, indeed the best, honored us very highly.”¹²

However, the European war horses were not main motif for the envoy to Avignon, even if the great khan may have considered them as a tribute offered to him by subjugate peoples. In fact,

⁹ L. Petech, “Les marchands italiens dans l’empire mongol”, *Journal Asiatique*, 250 (1962); Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971); Michel Balard, “Precursori di Cristoforo Colombo: i Genovesi in Estremo Oriente nel XIV secolo”, *Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi Colombiani, 13-14 ottobre 1973* (Genova, 1974); R. S. Lopez, “Nuove luci sugli Italiani in Estremo Oriente prima di Colombo”, *Su e giù per la storia di Genova* (Genova: Università di Genova, 1975); Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Chi era Andrea Franco?”, *Atti della società Ligure di storia patria*, vol.17 (1979); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (London: Longman, 2005); G. Airaldi and G. Meriana (eds.), *Andalo da Savignone. Un Genovese del’300 sulla via della seta* (Genova: De Ferrari, 2008).

¹⁰ Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen Age* (Leipzig, 1885), 2:218; L. Petech, “Les marchands italiens dans l’empire mongol”, *Journal Asiatique*, 250 (1962), 554-555; Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), pp.187-196; Robert Sabbatino Lopez, “Trafegando in partibus Catagii: altri genovesi in Cina nel Trecento”, *Su e giù per la storia di Genova* (Genova, 1975), pp.171-186; Roberto Sabbatino Lopez, “Nouveaux documents sur les marchands italiens en Chine à l’époque mongole”, *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1977), pp.445-457; Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Chi era Andrea Franco?”, *Atti della società Ligure di storia patria*, vol.17 (1979), pp.371-377; Lauren Arnold, *Princely gifts and papal treasures: the Franciscan mission to China and its influence on the art of the West 1250-1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999); G. Airaldi and G. Meriana (eds.), *Andalo da Savignone. Un Genovese del’300 sulla via della seta* (Genova: De Ferrari, 2008).

¹¹ Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.194; A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1500* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), pp.256-257.

although officially it was the Great Khan Toghon Temür that dispatched the envoy to Avignon in 1336, this event may not have been initiated by him. Being about seventeen years old in 1336 and not having taken a firm hold of power, the great khan could not afford to restore diplomatic relations with the papacy sending the envoy to Avignon.

Before his coronation in 1333, he had been kept from the imperial court and banished to Goryeo. When he became the last great khan of the Mongol empire as a boy in 1333, the internal struggle was weakening the political and military power of the central government. In fact he was under the domination of the Prime Minister Bayan who had his daughter made empress during the early reign. Surrounded by many hostile opponents, the ineffectual great khan could only depend on the support of military chiefs such as those of the Alans for his survival. In the end, the great khan may have had no choice to placate military chiefs to support him including those of the Alans for his own security and the security of his empire.¹³ Under these circumstances, chiefs of the Alans may have strongly demanded their khan to send an envoy to the Papacy to have a new archbishop to replace deceased Montecorvino and the great khan may have accepted their demand.

Who were the Alans? The Alans, an Indo-European tribe who had been in the Caucasus, was defeated by the Mongol forces in the middle of the 13th century. They were transported across Asia from their homeland in the Caucasus to serve the Mongol khans. They may have been forming the backbone of the Mongol army for the Great Khan Toghon Temür.

The Alans were considered as Christians by Carpini who says in his travel account “Erant enim ibi christiani plures, Gazari videlicet et Ruteni et Alani et alii, necnon et sarraceni.”¹⁴ William of Rubruck explains clearly that they followed the rites of the Greek Orthodox, used Greek texts and had Greek priests.¹⁵

Being transported from their home land to the Far East and without an orthodox clergy, the Alans in China may have converted themselves later to the Roman Catholicism. The mass

¹² A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), pp.256-257; Lauren Arnold, *Princely gifts and papal treasures: the Franciscan mission to China and its influence on the art of the West 1250-1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1990), p.105.

¹³ Lauren Arnold, *Princely gifts and papal treasures: the Franciscan mission to China and its influence on the art of the West 1250-1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999), p.104; Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), pp.187-190.

¹⁴ P. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Francisca: itinera et relations Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Firenze, 1929), vol.1, pp.70-71.

¹⁵ <In vigilia pentecostes venerunt ad nos quidam Alani qui ibi dicuntur Aas, christiani secundum ritum Grecorum et habentes litteras grecas et sacerdotes grecos, tamen non sun sicut Greci, sede sine acceptione persone venerantur omnem christianum.> P. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Francisca: itinera et relations Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Firenze, 1929), vol.1, pp.191-192.

conversion into Catholicism of the Alans who numbered about twenty to thirty thousand, was accomplished by Giovanni, the first archbishop of Beijing, probably in the 1310s. For Giovanni Montecorvino mentions only the story of his converting the good king George to the true catholic faith, without telling about the conversion of the Alans in his letters of 1305 and 1306.¹⁶ Peregrine, Franciscan friar, said in his letter to his colleagues in the Vicarate of the East in Europe on 30 December 1317 that “certain good Christians who are called Alans, receiving pay from the most great king for 20,000 persons, themselves and their families have joined Brother John. And he supports them and preaches.”¹⁷ Similarly Chiefs of the Alans said in the letter to Pope Benedict XII that “for a long time we were instructed in the Catholic faith and wholesomely governed and very much comforted by your legate Brother John, a valiant, holy and capable man, who nevertheless died eight year ago. In which years we have been without a governor and without spiritual consolation.”¹⁸ Many of the Alans have been converted to Catholicism by the first archbishop of Beijing, Montecorvino, who claims in his letter to have baptized about six thousand people in the first twelve years of his ministry in China.¹⁹ Marignolli may have meet chiefs of the Alans in Beijing in 1342, saying that “the chiefs princes also of his whole empire, more than 3,000, who are called Alans and govern the whole empire of the East, are Christians in fact or in name and call themselves slaves of the Pope, ready to die for Franks, for so they call us not from Francia but from Franquia.”²⁰

In 1336 several chiefs of the Christian Alans of Khanbaliq sent a letter to Pope Benedict XII (1334-1342), whose delivery would be effected by the Mongol envoy of the great khan.²¹ The

¹⁶ Frank W. Iklé, “The conversion of the Alani by the Franciscan missionaries”, James B. Parson, ed., *Papers in honor of professor Woodbridge Bingham: a festschrift for his seventy-fifth birthday* (San Francisco, 1976), p.30.

¹⁷ A. C. Moule, “Letter of Peregrine of Castille, Franciscan friar, 30 december 1317”, *New China Review*, vol.2 (1920), pp.538-544; Idem, *Christians in China before the year 1500* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930); P. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Francisca: itinera et relations Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Firenze, 1929), vol.1, p.366. <Item quidam christiani boni qui dicuntur Alani XXX milibus a Rege maximo stipendia accipientes ipsi et familie eorum ad Fr. Iohannem recurrunt. Et ipse eos confortat et predicat.>

¹⁸ <long tempore fuimus informati in fide catholica et salubriter gubernati et consolati plurimum per legatum vesgtrum fratrem Johannem Valentem, sanctum et sufficientum virum qui tamen mortuus est ante octo annos, in quibus fuimus sine gubernatore et sine spirituali consolaftione.> G. Daumet (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes, patentes et curiales se rapportant à la France* (Paris, 1899-1920), col.338, no.551.

¹⁹ Lauren Arnold, *Princely gifts and papal treasures: the Franciscan mission to China and its influence on the art of the West 1250-1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999), p.104.

²⁰ A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London, 1930), pp. 254-255; P. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Francisca: itinera et relations Fratrum Minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Firenze, 1929), vol.1, p.526. <Summi principes sui imperii tocuis plus quam triginta millia qui vocantur Alani et totum gubernant imperium orientis sunt christiani, re vel nomine, et dicunt se sclavos Pape, parati mori pro Franquis; sic enim vocant nos, non a Francia sed a Fraquia.>

purpose for chiefs of the Alans to send the letter to the Pope was evident. They revealed in their letter to the Pope that “ We send our envoy Andrew the Frank with fifteen companions to the pope the lord of Christians in France beyond the seven sea where the sun sets, to open the way for the frequent sending of envoys by us to the Pope and by the Pope to us, and to ask the Pope himself to send us his blessings and always to make mention of us in his holy prayers, and to accept our commendation of our servants the Alans who are his Christian sons. Also let him bring to us from the sun-setting horses and other wonderful things. Written in Khanbaliq in the year of the rat in the 6th month on the 3rd day of the moon.”²²

Even though chiefs of the Alans had sent the letter to have a new archbishop, they had not participate in the envoy to Avignon by themselves. With only four chiefs mentioned in the letter to Avignon, there appear in the response letter²³ sent by the Pope, five chiefs of the Alans: Fodim Jovens, Chyansam Tongi, Chemboya Vensy, Joanni Yochoy and Rubeo Pinzano. Even if the Alans are mentioned very often in the Yüan shih, it is difficult to know their specific role in the Mongol empire and their military activities in depth. It is accepted that they had high ranks of office such as great ministers of state, governors of the frontier provinces, president of the Board of war etc.²⁴ Fodim (福定), Jovens (院事), the first signatory of the letter to Pope Benedict XII, was the actual leader of the Alans and the president of the Board of war (知樞密院事).²⁵ His grand grand-father was Hans (杭忽思), his grand-father being (按法普), his father being Baidar (伯答兒).

Even if chiefs of the Alans had an initiative in the dispatch of the envoy, none of them went to Avignon as members of the envoy. There is only one Alan mentioned as member of the envoy in European documents. It was Toghai.²⁶ However, there may be a possibility that other Mongols or Alans accompanied the envoy, even though they were not mentioned in European documents.

²¹ Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.187.

²² He is called as Andalo da Savignone. A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London, 1930), pp. 252-253; Henri Yule and Henri Cordier (translated and edited), *Cathay and the way thither* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1914), vol.3, pp.209-269.

²³ G. Daumet (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes, patentes et curiales se rapportant à la France* (Paris, 1899-1920), col.280-282, no.448-453; Luke Wadding, *Annales Minorum: seu trium Ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum*, (Roma, 1733), vol.7, p.211.

²⁴ Henri Yule and Henri Cordier (translated and edited), *Cathay and the way thither* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1914), vol.3, pp.182; A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the year 1550* (London, 1930), pp. 260-264.

²⁵ Pelliot has found in the Yüan shih the names of several of the Alan chiefs of Beijing who sent this embassy. Fu-ting, Hsiang-shan, and Jayan-Buqa, which in the letter to Benedict XII became Fodim Jovens, Chyansam (Shyansam), and Chemboga (Semboga). R. Grousset, *The empire of the steppes: a history of the Central Asia* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p.603, no.63; Lauren Arnold, *Princely gifts and papal treasures: the Franciscan mission to China and its influence on the art of the West 1250-1350* (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999), p.104.

²⁶ Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.190.

The fact that Benedict XII took pains to compose letters to individual chiefs of the Alans as to the great khan and other khans, suggests that Alans had played the role to initiate the expedition of the Mongol envoy to Avignon.²⁷

Genoese merchants

It was Genoese merchants that have played a very important role in the exchange of political and religious envoys between the great Khan and the Papacy. We must count on European documents in order to know their role as official ambassadors between the two worlds, because Mongol sources are silent about them. The Latin letter to Pope Benedict XII by the Great Khan,²⁸ conserved in the Vatican Archives, mentions “Andrea Franco” as a leader of the envoy by the great Khan, who was composed of his fifteen attendants.²⁹ This Andrea has been very often considered as Andalo de Savignone. Cornelio Desimoni, Wilhelm Heyd, Girolamo Golubovich, Paul Pelliot, Robert S. Lopez, Luciano Petech and I. de Rachewiltz Yule and Cordier argue that Andrea Franco and Andalo da Savignone was the same person.³⁰ Michel Balard proposed a Genoese notarial act as a definitive proof that Andrea Franco corresponds to Andalo de Savignone. This notarial document refers to this person as Andalo or Andriolus.³¹ These Latin documents are frequently cited as an evidence to suggest that they must have been the same person, in that he was a Genoese and an ambassador to the Papacy by the Mongol Khan at the same period.

But Yule and Cordier refer to Andrea Franco as Andrea di Perugia, bishop of Zaitun in China. Benjamin J. Kedar suggests a totally different opinion that Andrea Franco, leader of the envoy, was rather Andrea de Nassio than Andalo.³² He suggests two documents to deny the opinion that Andrea Franco was Andalo da Savignone. One of them is a safe-conduct offered to Mongol ambassadors by pope Benedict XII in 19 June 1338, which says as follows: “Salvus

²⁷ G. Daumet (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes, patentes et curiales se rapportant à la France* (Paris, 1899-1920), col.280-282, no.448-451.

²⁸ Its original letter does not exist. We can count on only Latin translation.

²⁹ G. Daumet (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes, patentes et curiales se rapportant à la France* (Paris, 1899-1920), col.337, no.550.

³⁰ W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen Age* (Leipzig, 1885-1886), vol.2, p.218; L. Petech, “Les marchands italiens dans l’empire mongol”, *Journal Asiatique*, 250 (1962), pp.554-555; Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), pp.187-190; Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris, 1959), vol.1, p.23.

³¹ Michel Balard, “Precursori di Cristoforo Colombo: i Genovesi in Estremo Oriente nel XIV secolo”, *Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi Colombiani, 13-14 ottobre 1973* (Genova, 1974), p.155.

³² Peter Jackson also think that Andrea di Nascio served Toghon Temur as ambassador to Pope Benedict XII, while Andalo di Savignone accompanied the embassy. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (London: Longman, 2005), p.314.

conductus pro nobilibus viris Andrea et Guillemlo de Nassio, civibus Januen., et Thogay, Alano, de Carthyayo, nunciis magnifici principis imperatoris Tartarorum, de curia ad partes Tartarorum recedentibus.”³³ Only three persons, Andrea and Guglielmo de Nassio, Thogay are mentioned as messengers of the great Khan of the Tartar. Considering this Latin text, Andrea’s full name may have been Andrea de Nassio. It means that he was not Andalo da Savignone.

We should pay more attention to the fact that all of them were Genoese merchants and belonged to the envoy sent by the Great Khan and extend the scope of the investigation toward other members of the envoy. The number of members of the envoy is different according to European sources. The Vatican document mentions one leader of the envoy and his fifteen attendants, while the Latin text in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* cites Andrea and his five companions. On the contrary, in the safe-conduct offered to Mongol ambassadors by Pope Benedict XII on 19 June 1338 are mentioned only three persons such as two Genoese citizens and one Alan of Cathay. They were Andrea de Nassio, Guglielmo de Nassio, and Thogay. This safe-conduct does not mention Andalo da Savignone. But it is certain that he was a member of the envoy. In fact, he appears in the register of the Venetian senate (22 December 1338), which says as follows: quod Andalo de Savignonis nuncius et ambaxator domini imperatoris Tartarorum possit extrahere de Veneciis per se vel eius nuncium a quinque usque in decem equos et iochalia usque ad valorem florenorum duorum milium et portare ad partes et terras dicti domini imperatoris cum navigiis Venetorum nostrorum.>³⁴ Andalo made his way to Venice in order to buy horses and precious jewelries demanded by the Great Khan, with other members staying in Genoa. Even if the government of Venice permitted him to export horses and jewels of crystal by a Venetian ship on 22 December 1338, the embassy procured those items not in Venice but in Genoa.³⁵

We can know at least four persons, that is, three Genoese citizens and one Alan of Cathay among members of the envoy: Andrea de Nassio, Guglielmo de Nassio, Andalo da Savignone and Thogay. Who were the other members of the envoy? One document suggests a hint for answering the question. The text is the list of persons who received plenary indulgences from Pope Benedict XII on 13 June 1338, the same day when he composed letters to the Great

³³ J. M. Vidal (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes et patentes intéressant les pays autres que la France* (Paris, 1913-1950), col.543, no.1870.

³⁴ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Misti, Deliberazioni, reg. XVII, fol.117r.

³⁵ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Senato Misti, Deliberazioni, reg. XVII, fol.117r. <quod Andalo de Savignonis nuncius et ambaxator domini imperatoris Tartarorum possit extrahere de Veneciis per se vel eius nuncium a quinque usque in decem equos et iochalia usque ad valorem florenorum duorum milium et portare ad partes et terras dicti domini imperatoris cum navigiis Venetorum nostrorum.> fol.116v <quod concedatur nobili viro Andallo de Savignonis de Ianua ambaxatori domini imperatoris Tartarorum de Catayo, supplicanti nomine suo et aliorum suorum sotiorum ambaxatorum dicti domini imperatoris, quod possint ad partes illas conducere equos a quinque usque in decem et iocalia de cristalloy valoris a mille usque in duobus milibus florenis auri.>

Khan and chiefs of the Alans. It seems that the Pope dealt with several matters concerning the envoy from 13 to 19 June 1338: reception of the envoy, composition of letters to Mongol rulers, concession of plenary indulgence, offer of safe-conduct, composition of letters of recommendation addressed to the king of Sicily, the king of Hungary and the doge of Venice, etc.

On 13 June 1338, Benedict XII accorded plenary indulgences to Prens de Nassio and his wife Marchesia, Andrea de Nassio and his wife Argenta, Guglielmo de Nassio, Thogay (Alan of Cambalic), Piccamilio de Piccamilio and his wife Petra, Matteo de Nassio, Benedicto de Savignone and his wife Isabella, Maenza de Savignone, Andalo de Savignone and his wife Alexia, Enrico de Lomello (clergy of the Papacy), Argenta de Savignone, and Saladino Caravello.³⁶ Considering that in this list appear four persons who belonged to the envoy sent to Avignon by the Great Khan, it is a possibility that other persons who received plenary indulgences from the Pope with four principal members of the envoy, Andrea de Nassio, Guglielmo de Nassio³⁷, Thogay and Andalo de Savignone, may have been their attendants. Except women mentioned in the Vatican document, one Alan and one clergy, the rest of them were all Genoese citizens, which suggests that Genoese had played the most important role in the envoy of the year 1366.

How had citizens of Genoa played such an important role in diplomatic relations between the Mongol empire and the Papacy. In Central Asia, merchants have traditionally tended to play the roles of not only merchants but also ambassadors. During the period of the Mongol empire, Italian merchants had generally taken the role of ambassadors between the Mongol World and Europe.³⁸ Particularly, it is well known that Genoese merchants among Europeans played the most active commercial activities in the Mongol World during the period of the Mongol empire.

³⁶ Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Chi era Andrea Franco?", *Atti della societa Ligure di storia patria*, vol.17 (1979), p.375; J. M. Vidal (ed.), *Benoît XII (1334-1342): lettres closes et patentes intéressantes les pays autres que la France* (Paris, 1913-1950), col.539, no.1848-1860. "Dilecto filio Parenti de Nassio, laico, et dilectae filiae nobili mulieri Marchesiae, ejus uxori, Januen. Dioec.; - Andreae de Nassio, et Argentae, ejus uxori, januen. Dioec.; -Guillelmo de Nassio, laico Januen. Dioec.; Thagay quondam Sarman Alani, laico Cambalech dioec.; - Piccamilio de Piccamiliis et Petrae, ejus uxori, civibus januen.; - Matthaeo de Nassio, laico januen. Dioecesis; - Benedicto de Savinhonis et Isabellae, ejus uxori, civibus januen.; Maenzae, relictæ quondam Benedicti de Savinhonis, laici, viduae Januen.; -Andalo de Savinhonis et Alaxiae, ejus uxori, civibus januen.;- Henrico, quondam Petri Prinelli, de Lomello, cleric Papien. Dioec.; - Argentae, relictæ quondam Bonifacii de Savinhonis, laici, viduae janue.; - Saladino Caravello, civi januen.

³⁷ Igor de Rachewiltz considered him as a Frenchman. Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal envoys to the Great Khans* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p.190.

³⁸ Guiscard Bustari, a Florentine merchant, who had been at the Ilkhan's court since childhood, led an embassy of one hundred Mongols sent by Ghazan, Il Khan to Pope Boniface VIII. Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (London: Longman, 2005), p.314; Denis Sinor, "Diplomatic practices in medieval Inner Asia", C. E. Bosworth et al., eds., *Essays in honor of Bernard Lewis. The Islamic world from classical to modern times* (Princeton, 1988), pp.337-355.

After 1320s, the voyage even to Beijing has not been any more adventure but an enterprise familiar to merchants of Genoa.³⁹ Pegolotti in his account of the route to China gave all the weights and measures in Genoese terms has been taken as especially significant, as has a casual reference in Boccaccio's Decameron which seems to assume a particular Genoese acquaintance with the Far East. As in Iran, individual Genoese whose initial presence was concerned with commerce were employed on diplomatic duties by the Mongol rulers.

Genoese merchants were indeed not only temporary or permanent residents in the Mongol World pursuing commercial activities there, but they were also engaged with embassies by the Popes to the Mongols and vice versa.⁴⁰ One of the well-known examples is Buscarello de Ghisolfi (d. after 1304). He had been very actively engaged in trade in Tabriz, great market in the Ilkhanate. Together with his brother Percivalle and his nephew Corrado, he took several political missions as a diplomatic ambassador to the pope and to European rulers by the Ilkhan Arghun in 1289, 1295 and 1304.

Andalo de Savignone who participated in the envoy of the year 1336 by the Great khan, are a Genoese merchant installed in Beijing doing his commercial activities. The activities of Andalo de Savignone, one member of the envoy, tell that Genoese merchants could have taken the role of ambassadors both for the papacy and Mongol khans. He had made three voyages between Europe and Beijing, capital of the Mongol empire during the period of the 1330s. In 1330, he was doing his commercial activities in Beijing with other Genoese merchants including his business partner, Leone Vegia.⁴¹ With Leone Vegia, he undertook a role of the executor for the sake of his another fellow citizen, Antonio Salmoyra, who died there in October 1330. The testament was written not by a notary but a friar of the Minor Order called Antonio in Beijing. Returning to Genoa, Andalo restituted the money to Percivalle Mazzono, creditor of the deceased on 27 March 1333, who had invested 30 Genoese lire to Antonio Salmoyra. On October 1333, Andalo and Leone paid custom taxes of 667 lire and 10 soldi corresponding 475 lire of Chinese

³⁹ Michel Balard, "Precursori di Cristoforo Colombo: i Genovesi in Estremo Oriente nel XIV secolo", *Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi Colombiani, 13-14 ottobre 1973* (Genova, 1974), p.154.

⁴⁰ Apart from the Polos there are other examples of merchants involved in political and religious missions. One is the Venetian, Pietro de Lucalongo, who, in 1291, accompanied Montecorvino (1247-ca. 1330) on his way to China from Tabriz. Moreover, it is known that Venetian merchants transferred Montecorvino's letters from China to Tabriz. In one of these letters Montecorvino mentioned his contacts with a Genoese merchant, perhaps Ventura de Sarezana who had joined the Franciscan Order in Quanzhou some time before 1326.

⁴¹ <Confitetur Andalo de Savignonis fidecomissario et executori/ una cum Leone Vegia/ relicto per quondam Anthonium Salmoyram de Clavaro qui decessse dicitur in partibus Cathay in civitate vocata Camebech anno currente MCCCXXX de mense octubris, sicut de ipsa fidecomissario et executore aparet in ultima voluntate dicti quondam Anthonii, scripta manu cuiusdam fratris minoris vocati fratris Iacobi.> Michel Balard, "Precursori di Cristoforo Colombo: i Genovesi in Estremo Oriente nel XIV secolo", *Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi Colombiani, 13-14 ottobre 1973* (Genova, 1974).

silk to Enrico Veggio, notary and collector of customs.⁴² Silk was the most popular Chinese merchandise to European merchants in Beijing. Genoese merchants brought silk to Champagne fairs.

He left again Genoa for the destination of Beijing, probably in 1334 and may have arrived there in 1335. And then he received the mission to participate in the envoy from the Great Khan in July 1336. Probably the Great Khan may have met these Genoese merchants including Andalo in his court and appointed them as ambassadors to Avignon, considering that they have been a representative group among Europeans in Beijing and have been accustomed to the voyage between the Mongol Empire and Europe.⁴³

⁴² <Confitetur Andalo de Savignonis fidecomissario et executori/ una cum Leone Vegia/ relicto per quondam Anthonium Salmoyram de Clavaro qui decessse dicitur in partibus Cathay in civitate vocata Camebech anno currente MCCCXXX de mense octubris, sicut de ipsa fidecomissario et executore aparet in ultima voluntate dicti quondam Anthonii, scripta manu cuiusdam fratris minoris vocati fratris Iacobi.> Michel Balard, "Precursori di Cristoforo Colombo: i Genovesi in Estremo Oriente nel XIV secolo", *Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi Colombiani, 13-14 ottobre 1973* (Genova, 1974), p.155.

⁴³ Michel Balard, "Precursori di Cristoforo Colombo: i Genovesi in Estremo Oriente nel XIV secolo", *Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi Colombiani, 13-14 ottobre 1973* (Genova, 1974), p.155.