

Mercantile and Religious Mobility between Byzantines, Latins and Muslims, 1200-1500: On the Theory and Practice of Social Networks

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This paper combines documentary evidence with concepts and tools of historical network science and social theory in order to explore phenomena of (especially) mercantile mobility and religious conversion in the late medieval Byzantine world. The intensification of commercial exchange and the multiplication of contact zones between ethnic and religious identities in the 13th to 15th centuries, both due to the growth of the activity of Italian merchant communities as well as due to the Mongol expansion across entire Asia, facilitated the change of places of residence and/or of religious confession for elite as well as non-elite members of these societies. With the help of network analytical and sociological concepts, potential underlying mechanisms such as the »social infrastructure« for these phenomena are described. In general, the last centuries of the relationship between Byzantium and the West saw the intensification of processes of individual and community-wide religious change, which equally shaped the following early modern period of Mediterranean history.

Keywords: Byzantine history, Mediterranean Studies, Religious studies, Network analysis, Social Theory, Late Medieval History, Religious conversions, Medieval trade, Church history

Prologue: Byzantines, Latins and Muslims in Tanaïs, 1356-1360

In the year 1356 AD, a document from the »Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople« informs us that in the city of Tanaïs on the river Don (today Azov), which was under the sovereignty of the Muslim Khan of the Golden Horde, a Byzantine orthodox Christian »went over to the Persians« (here used as a synonym for Muslims) and »became a Muslim« (the verb used in the Greek text is »*musulmanizo*«, to date a *hapax legomenon*).¹ The menace for the souls of the Christians (*psychikon kindynon*) who had to live under Muslim (or Latin) rule

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1 See *PRK* III, no. 215, ll. 117-118; cf. also *LBG* 5, 1049 (on the verb »*musulmanizo*«).

and next to Muslim (or Latin) neighbours is a common topic in this most important collection of documents on the Late Byzantine Church.² The worst fear of the patriarch and the Synod was, of course, the conversion of their spiritual children either »to the ungodliness of the Muslims« or the »heresy of the Latins«.³

Tanaïs at the mouth of the river Don was at the same time the most important trading post of the Venetians in the Northern Black Sea and a city of many religious and ethnic groups. Fortunately, the notarial records of Benedetto Bianco for the period September 1359–August 1360, preserved in the *Archivio di Stato di Venezia* and analysed by Sergei P. Karpov,⁴ allow us to reconstruct the religious and ethnic environment of this act of conversion in greater detail.⁵ Under the sovereignty of the Golden Horde, during this period Tanaïs attracted many merchants from Venice and its Italian hinterland as well as its colonies in the Adriatic and the Aegean Sea, but also many other Italians, even from Venice's main rival Genoa, as well as Catalans from the far west of the Mediterranean. In addition, we also find »Byzantine« or »Greek« traders from Constantinople and Trebizond in the city, other Orthodox Christians from Russia and Alania (in the north-western Caucasus), Armenians from diaspora communities in the Black Sea region as well as from Armenia proper, Jewish merchants and Muslim merchants, some of them subjects of the Golden Horde (»Tatars«), but also from Eastern Anatolia and Tabriz (*Fig. 1*). This mosaic becomes even more multifaceted if we look at the places of origin of the most important commodity traded in Tanaïs: slaves, especially young girls. Most of them originated from the immediate and wider hinterland of the city (Tatars, Circassians, Alans), but we also encounter Russian, Greek, Armenian and Jewish slaves as well as one Chinese girl in 1359/1360.⁶ At such a hub of encounters between Islam and Western as well as Eastern Christianity and Judaism, an act of religious conversion may not be a great surprise.⁷

2 *PRK* I, no. 7 (July–Sept. 1315), l. 5; Todt, *Kaiser Johannes VI.*, 606; Vryonis, *Byzantine Attitudes*.

3 See also Preiser-Kapeller, *Conversion, collaboration and confrontation*.

4 Karpov, *Tana; Karpov, Les Occidentaux*.

5 Cf. also Epstein, *Purity Lost*, 118–130. For mercantile mobility in this period in general, see Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Moving hands*, with further literature. For parallel examples from Mamluk Egypt in the same period see Christ, *Trading Conflicts*, and for Anatolia at large Preiser-Kapeller, *Liquid Frontiers*.

6 Karpov, *Tana; Karpov, Les Occidentaux*.

7 For the interplay between mercantile and religious mobility on the significance of social networks in the ancient western Indian Ocean cf. also Seland, *Networks and social cohesion*.

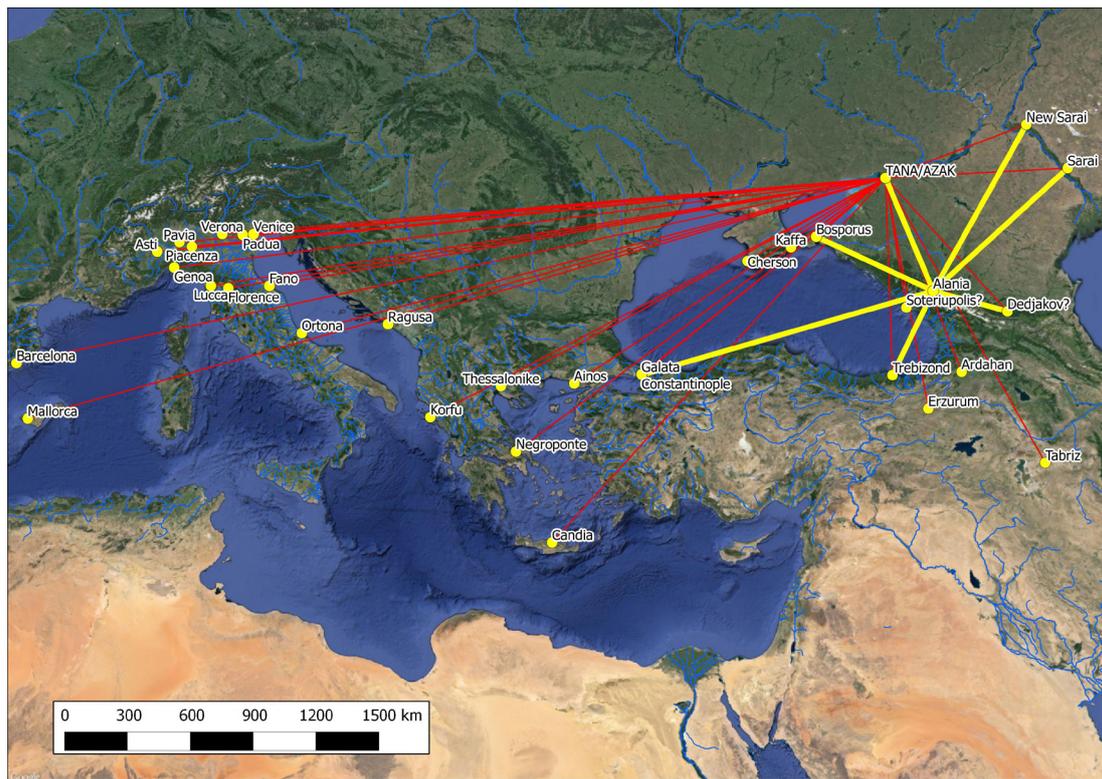


Fig. 1: The interconnections between Tanaï and the Mediterranean world on the basis of the information on places of origin of merchants active in the city in 1359/1360 (red lines) and the range of connections and influence of the metropolitan Symeon of Alania in the 1350s and 1360s on the basis of the information from the documents from the Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (yellow lines) (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018)]

Yet, the Synod of bishops in Constantinople took notice of the specific conversion due to a peculiarity: the convert was the brother of the Byzantine Orthodox metropolitan Symeon of Alania in the northwestern Caucasus.⁸ The see of Alania, although at the periphery of the Byzantine ecclesiastical sphere, had since the 13th century been of increased importance for Byzantium's influence in the region. Alans lived not only in their homeland in the north-western Caucasus, but in many places within the realm of the Golden Horde in the Caucasus, in the Crimea and also in the capital of Saray on the River Volga, where they also served in the army of the Khan. Due to the »diffusion« of their flock, the metropolitans of Alania were active in many of these localities and served as intermediaries between Constantinople and the Khan. In addition, the metropolitans of Alania also traditionally had good relations with Trebizond, the capital of a Byzantine state in exile; it was from here that Symeon and his brother also originated (Fig. 1).⁹ This network the two of them also used for their purposes as they came into conflict with several orthodox priests (the *protopapas* Michael, the *presbyteros* Nikolaos and the *presbyteros* Theodoros) in the city of Tanaï over property and ecclesiastical rights.

8 PRK III, no. 215, ll. 113-126; Kresten, Die Affäre des Metropoliten Symeon von Alania, 26-27.

9 Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz*, 16-21, Preiser-Kapeller, *Zwischen Konstantinopel und Goldener Horde*, and Preiser-Kapeller, *The global Patriarch*, with further literature.

In order to counter an appeal by the three priests to the Synod in Constantinople, Symeon travelled to the Khan Jānibek (r. 1342-1357) of the Golden Horde and provided himself with a privilege charter (a *jarliḡ*; in the Greek text »*dialeichion*«¹⁰), which allowed him (and his brother) to continue their occupation of the three priests' property. However, Symeon had to answer to the Synod in Constantinople and travelled to the Bosphorus. In his absence, the three priests also made for the capital of the Golden Horde and were able to achieve a new decision in their own favour (the source indicates that bribery played an important role at the Khan's court in both cases). It was in this situation and especially in order to avoid the payment of compensation to the priests that Symeon's brother »*went to the Persians*« (which did not imply covering a long distance in Tanais) and »*became a Muslim*«, thereby outplaying his opponents. A priori, modern-day observers may be as astonished about the conversion of this man as was the Synod of Constantinople: he was the brother of a high-ranking orthodox hierarch, embedded in a network of secular and ecclesiastical Byzantine authorities in the region (Fig. 2/3). Yet, it was especially this network of Symeon of Alania, which criss-crossed political and religious borders, and which, in addition to the multi-religious and multi-ethnic environment of Tanais, also opened channels of interaction beyond their traditional religious community for his brother (Fig. 2/1). Before the Synod, Symeon, of course, officially condemned his brother's conversion; but further information suggests that Symeon, whom we get to know as a very smart politician on many occasions,¹¹ continued cooperation with his brother, whose new status as a convert he may have accepted as a most welcome extension of the potential of his network.

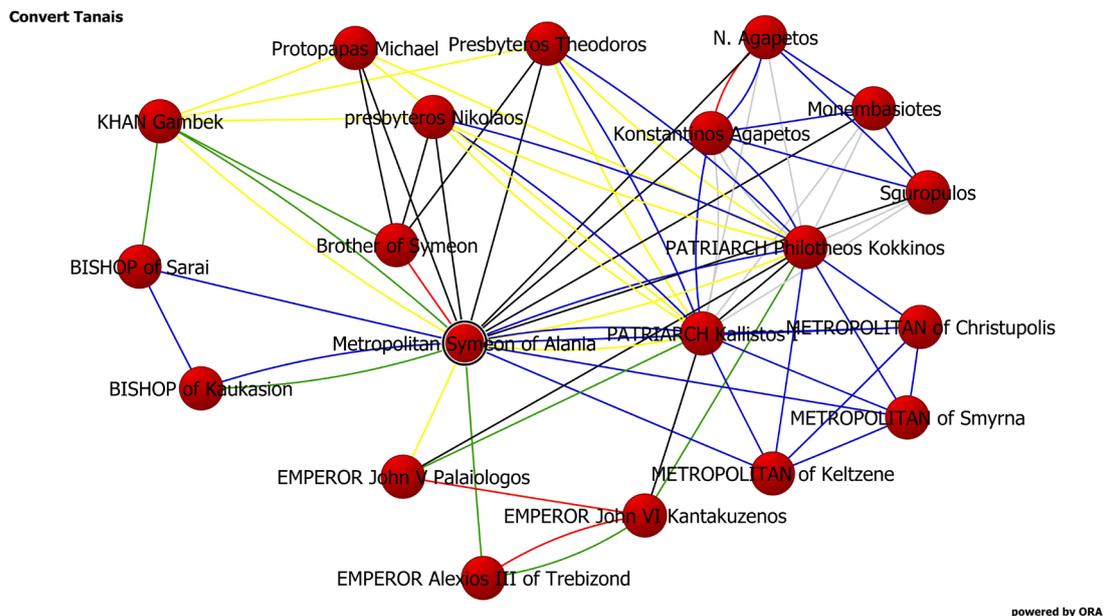
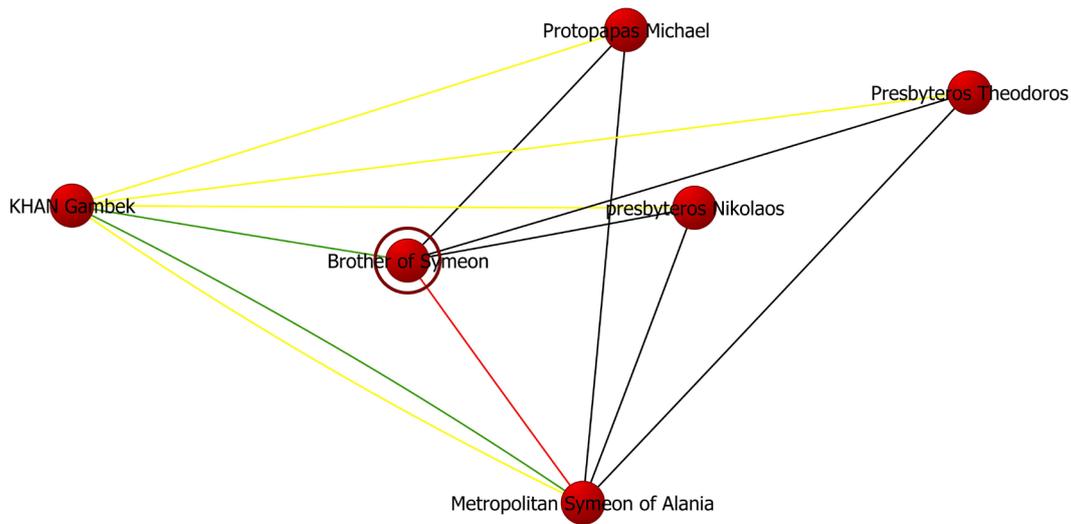


Fig. 2: The social network of Metropolitan Symeon of Alania and his brother between Byzantines and the Muslim Khan of the Golden Horde, with ties of kinship (red), support (green), appellation (yellow), conflict (black), subordination and professional association (blue) and of other qualities (grey) (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

10 Cf. Hinterberger, Bezeichnung für eine mongolische Urkunde.

11 Kresten, Die Affäre des Metropoliten Symeon von Alania.

Convert Tanais



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Fig. 3: The immediate »Ego-network« of Symeon's brother (colours of ties as per Fig. 2) (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

Social networks and religious conversion

The social environment of this late medieval act of conversion is relatively well documented, at least from a Byzantinist's point of view; the source evidence enables us to reconstruct the embedding of the convert in a personal (the social network centred around his brother) and local (the multi-religious environment of Tanais) web of relations and interactions (Fig. 1). Marc David Baer in his book »Honored by the Glory of Islam« (2008) stated:

»Most scholars writing about religious conversion today have moved away from the school of thought associated with the eminent William James, based on an uncritical reading of converts' narratives that emphasizes the (Protestant) individual's psychological experience of conversion. Historical sources, especially Ottoman material, seldom provide insight into the converted, so the psychological approach developed first by James is limited in its utility. Instead of such an interiorist approach, which focuses on an individual in isolation, scholars emphasize the social and historical context and aspects of conversion, arguing that conversion is motivated by social relationships and interpersonal bonds. Arguing against James, they maintain that conversion, which entails internal and external transformation, whether revivalist or transition to another tradition, does not occur in a vacuum, is not merely the result of an individual's studied reflection of his or her relation to the divine or the transformation of an individual living in solitude. Nor does conversion concern only an autonomous quest for spiritual meaning, the isolated interior path of selfrealization, or a moment in a single individual's private personal destiny. It is not only the life of the mind that matters, but also the life of the social being, for conversion is not only deeply private, but also deeply social.«¹²

12 Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 14-15.

In her book »Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire« (2011), Tijana Krstić likewise wrote:

»Although the agents of syncretism and anti-syncretism were multiple and diverse, they all relied on social networks to incite religious change and create a feeling of an (interpretative) community. The importance of the household – common, noble, sultanic, or otherwise – was paramount in this process. This perspective contradicts historiography on conversion to Islam, which views the key agents of syncretism and conversion (the »state« and the dervishes) as external to the communities to which converts-to-be belonged. As the dialogue of narrative and archival sources presented here show, the importance of social networks in the study of conversion to Islam cannot be overstated. Even in the case of the janissaries, whose mode of recruitment inspires the view of the Ottoman state as an »external« agent of conversion, one could argue that the real religious change happened only within the sultan's household or in the context of homeschooling young recruits received when they were placed in different Anatolian Muslim families to learn Turkish and hard physical work as a part of their training. Other types of social relations, such as professional networks, also played an important role in the process of conversion to Islam.«¹³

With these observations, Baer and Krstić support our approach of looking at the »social networks« of converts in detail.¹⁴ With »social network«, Krstić uses a concept very popular in recent scholarship, but, as in many other cases, she does not take into account the conceptual and analytical framework established around this term in sociology as well as other new disciplines such as socio-physics.¹⁵ Recent studies work mainly within the framework of quantitative network analysis, which concentrates on the construction of quantifiable network models (with nodes and ties or links) on the basis of relational data and on the mathematical analysis of these models with regard to their general structure and the differences between nodes and groups or clusters of nodes.¹⁶ Yet, besides or in addition to quantitative analysis, the field of »relational sociology« has highlighted more »qualitative« aspects of social networks with regard to their relevance for the embedding and even construction of identities and relationships.¹⁷ In our studies of historical networks we have attempted to combine both approaches;¹⁸ we will do this also for the present study. Due to the character of source evidence, we will present a quantitative approach especially for the macro-perspective of religious conversion, while we will concentrate on the qualitative aspects for our view on the networks of individual converts.

13 Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 72-73.

14 For an overview on earlier research, cf. Grivaud and Popovic, *Les conversions à l'Islam*.

15 Newman, *Networks*, and already Reinhard, *Freunde und Kreaturen*. Cf. also Preiser-Kapeller, Letters and network analysis, the new handbook of Düring *et al.*, *Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung*, and for network theory and religious studies esp. Everton, *Networks and Religion*.

16 Prell, *Social Network Analysis*; Jullien, *Netzwerkanalyse in der Mediävistik*; Düring *et al.*, *Handbuch Historische Netzwerkforschung*; Everton, *Networks and Religion*, 47-84.

17 Fuhse and Mützel, *Relationale Soziologie*; Mische, *Relational sociology*.

18 Mitsiou, *Networks of Nicaea*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Visualising Communities*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Maritime mobility*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Calculating the Middle Ages*.

Religious conversion in the Middle Ages and models of »social contagion«

A quantitative »macro-approach« to medieval conversion is not a new idea; already in 1979, Richard W. Bulliet tried to extract quantitative data on the growth of the Muslim community during the first centuries of Islam for Iran and Spain especially from biographical compilations on the genealogy of several hundred families.¹⁹ This data was used by the evolutionary biologist Peter Turchin to test his mathematical model for such a process of diffusion of new religious ideas within a community;²⁰ he plotted the proportions of Iranian and Spanish families converting to Islam during 25 years periods on a graph. Then he compared this plot with the trajectory of the rate of conversion calculated with his mathematical model, which followed this equation:

$$C(t) = \frac{1}{1 + \left[\frac{1-y}{y}\right] \exp[-rt]}$$

where $C(t)$ is the proportion of converts at a specific time-step (t), $y = C(0)$, the initial proportion of converts at time $t = 0$, and r is the relative rate of conversion. With his model, Turchin achieved what he claims to be an »excellent« fit (the curve of his model explains more than 99.5 % of the variations in the data for the Iranian as well as the Spanish case). For the creation of his what he calls »autocatalytic model«, Turchin in turn relied on the observations of Rodney Stark, who attempted a similar quantitative analysis for the rise of Christianity from the time of Jesus Christ until the 4th century; Stark also stated: »The basis for successful conversionist movements is the growth through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments.«²¹ To model such diffusion processes on networks, Turchin and earlier researchers rely on models developed for the analysis of processes of contagion; therefore, one speaks of processes of »epidemic diffusion« or »social contagion«.²² This may suggest that processes of religious conversion follow some law of nature – once started they will not stop until an entire population is converted. Richard Bulliet also describes this process as a »chain reaction« and wrote: »This chain reaction leads to a brief period of very rapid growth, which I shall refer to as the »bandwagon« period. On the graph of conversion to Islam in Iran, the bandwagon period is represented by the steepest slope on the curve, between 791 and 864.«²³ For the period and region we are especially interested in, Bulliet identified such a »bandwagon period« for the conversion to Islam in Anatolia in the early 13th century, but unfortunately without providing any quantitative or other evidence for this assumption.²⁴

Considering the diffusion of religious ideas, however, many »unsuccessful« religious movements with regard to mass conversion suggest a contrary view. As recent research has demonstrated, the spread of a social contagion within a network very much depends on the position of nodes serving as »starting points« for such a process (are these nodes in the

19 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*.

20 Turchin, *Historical Dynamics*, 94-117.

21 Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 20; cf. also Collar, *Network Theory and Religious Innovation*; Collar, *Religious Networks*; Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*; Czachesz, *Women, charity and mobility*.

22 Cf. also Jackson, *Social and Economic Networks*, 185-208; Newman, *Networks*, 627-638.

23 Bulliet, *Islam*, 38-39.

24 Bulliet, *Islam*, 170.

centre of a social network or at its periphery? Are they more or less well connected?) and on the predisposition of nodes towards such an innovation (also expressed in quantitative terms in the ratio of neighbouring nodes, who have already adopted the contagion, necessary for a specific node in order to adopt it itself). Overall, the general »topology« of a network (are most nodes equally well connected or do we observe a very unequal distribution of the number of connections between a mass of less well connected nodes and a small number of hubs?) very much influences the speed and success of such diffusion processes.²⁵ If, for instance, a central hub within an unequally distributed network (in a medieval society, the ruler for instance) adopts a contagion, it actually can spread across the entire network in a short time (therefore, concentrating on rulers for spreading their message was not a bad idea for medieval missionaries, also from a network analytical point of view).²⁶

Dynamics of conversion

Actually, conversion could also be a relatively rapid process from the point of view of contemporaries. Significant in this respect is a letter from Patriarch John XIV Kalekas to the clergy and laymen of the city of Nicaea in north-western Asia Minor, written in 1338/1339, a mere seven years after the capture of the city by the Ottomans. The Patriarch wrote:²⁷

Now the attack of the Ismaelites has overwhelmed us, with the permission of God because of the quantity of (our) sins. They have captured many of us, (they have) enslaved and displaced them with violence, so that they (= the captured Christians) – alas! – select their wickedness and ungodliness. (... But) Those who choose the true faith in God and desist from the wickedness of the Muslims, in which they have fallen, (the church) will again attribute to the flock of Christians, heal and maintain them; they will not find an obstacle to the salvation of their souls because of their, as I said, earlier error.

A few years after the Ottoman occupation of Nicaea, the Patriarch was concerned about the number of conversions to Islam to such an extent that he was more or less prepared to promise exemption from punishment for those who were disposed to return to Christendom, although the canon law of course prescribed heavy penalization for apostasy.²⁸ But the Patriarchate was also well aware that Islamic law imposed capital punishment on apostates, and thus John XIV Kalekas made even more concessions:

25 Newman, *Networks*, 627-675; Collar, *Network Theory and Religious Innovation*; Everton, *Networks and Religion*, 238-248. Most recently, the *Generative Historiography of Religion Project (GEHIR)* at the Masaryk University, Brno (PI: Prof. Aleš Chalupa), has experimented with various quantitative and computer-based models for religious diffusion and conversion for case studies of the ancient period, see gehir.phil.muni.cz

26 Cf. also Ormerod and Roach, *The medieval inquisition*; Collar, *Network theory*, 152, 155; Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 497.

27 *PRK* II, no. 116, ll. 17-30; cf. also Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 341-343; Todt, *Kaiser Johannes VI.*, 614-616.

28 Cf. Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 234-239, with further literature.

*But all those, who from fear of punishment want to live for themselves and in secret, where they internalize and realize Christianity, will equally find (the) healing inasmuch as they make every effort to keep the commandments of God.*²⁹

This patriarchal statement equals an invitation to Crypto-Christianity and illustrates the flexibility of the Byzantine church hierarchy in their attempts to maintain Christian life in the face of what they considered a large scale conversion to Islam («behaviors are more easily detectable than beliefs»³⁰). In this case, of course, conditions very much differed in comparison with a more or less deliberate crossing of borders like we observed in the case of the brother of Symeon of Alania; the social embedding of individuals already under the rule of potentates of a different faith constricted the free space for selection of religious alternatives.³¹ Especially within such frameworks of integration of a community into a polity dominated by a different faith, diffusion models such as those developed by Bulliet or Stark may prove their validity, although they always will explain only the possibly observable quantitative change in the ratio of converts on a macro-perspective. The actual structural and qualitative pre-conditions for conversion again only become visible with a more detailed inspection of their social embedding.

The micro-perspective: the social embedding and networks of converts

One problem for a »network-approach« to conversion is the character of most of the sources which have been preserved and interpreted; Krstić states, for instance, that the network-perspective »contradicts historiography on conversion to Islam, which views the key agents of syncretism and conversion (the »state« and the dervishes) as external to the communities to which converts-to-be belonged«. Nevertheless, »the importance of social networks in the study of conversion to Islam cannot be overstated«. ³² Hagiographic texts, for instance, such as those used by Spyros Vryonis as the main source for his chapter on conversion in medieval Anatolia, connect acts of conversion to the deeds of holy men such as Ḥājī Baktāš Walī or Maulānā Ġalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī.³³ Yet, as Şevket Küçükhüseyn has highlighted, these texts may more reflect the self-perception of the followers of these saints, who understood the saint's personality as a primary mover for conversion.³⁴ It may be difficult to reconstruct the actual social embedding, which could divert our perspective on conversion from single authoritative figures,³⁵ of late medieval converts from these sources.

29 PRK II, no. 116, ll. 34-38; cf. also Balivet, *Byzantins et Ottomans*, 231-254.

30 Cf. Stroope, Social networks and religion, 20.

31 Cf. Epstein, *Purity Lost*; for the situation in the territories under Muslim rule in Anatolia cf. also Korobeinikov, Orthodox communities I; Korobeinikov, Orthodox communities II; Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz*; Preiser-Kapeller, Conversion, collaboration and confrontation. For a relative frequency of »voluntary« conversions cf. the analysis of 297 cases of converts from territories within or near the Ottoman Empire in the late 16th/early 17th century in Bennassar and Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah*, 222-229: from these 297 converts, 174 were captives of war, 43 became Muslims through *devşirme* and 11 conversions were voluntary ones.

32 Krstić, *Contested Conversions*, 72.

33 Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*.

34 Küçükhüseyn, *Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung*.

35 Cf. also Schor, Conversion by the numbers, 474-478; Czachesz, Women, charity and mobility, 131.

Motivations and backgrounds for conversion

Contemporaneous documents referring to acts of conversion (as in the case mentioned above) or even written for this occasion may be more helpful in this regard. Within the above-mentioned Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, we find 29 confessions of faith of converts to the Orthodox Church for the period between 1360 and 1404.³⁶ Only one of the individuals converted from Islam, while all others were converts from the »Latin« Church. This may also indicate the actual frequency of such events, but most interestingly, this one convert from Islam had previously converted from Orthodoxy to Islam (see below). Even more pleasant for the Byzantine authorities would, of course, have been the conversion of a Muslim by birth to Christianity. In the year 1180, on the initiative of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, the Byzantine church had modified the official formula for such conversions in order to make it more acceptable for Muslims.³⁷

In the Register of the Patriarchate we encounter only one born Muslim who became Christian; but this man had been baptised a »Latin« (i.e. »Roman Catholic«) Christian and had received the name Antonius before he confessed his adherence to the dogmas of the church of Constantinople in February 1374. Based on the background to similar documents, the reason for this conversion may have been his intended marriage to an Orthodox woman.³⁸ At the end of the document, Antonius declared:

καὶ οἰκειοχείρως αὐτὴν ὑπογράφω τῇ γλώττῃ καὶ τοῖς γράμμασιν, οἷς ἐπίσταμαι.
(»And by my own hand I sign this (confession) in the language and with the letters which I understand«).³⁹

Actually, we possess Antonius' autograph signature in Arabic letters in the Persian language, which reads: »*Andūn. The Muslim has passed away, I have believed with my heart in God*«. ⁴⁰ Beneath the Persian signature, the scribe from the patriarchal chancellery wrote a rather imperfect translation:

Ταῦτα λέγουσι τῇ τῶν Ἑλλήνων γλώττῃ· ὁ ἀπὸ τῶν Μουσουλμάνων ποτὲ Ἀντώνιος.
(»This means in Greek language: the former (convert) from the Muslims, Antonios«)⁴¹

36 Cf. Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*. For a most recent analysis of these documents see Mitsiou, »I believe what the Great Church believes«.

37 Montet, *Un rituel d'abjuration*, on the older formula; Darrouzès, *Tomos inédit de 1180*; Sahas, *Ritual of conversion*; Angold, *Church and Society*, 111-113; Hanson, *Manuel I Comnenus*; cf. also Beihammer, *Orthodoxy and religious antagonism*, for the wider background of Byzantine-Seljuk relations.

38 Todt, *Kaiser Johannes VI.*, 243; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 255.

39 MM I, 550-551 (no. 293) = PRK IV, no. 374; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 255.

40 *Vind. hist. graec.* 47, fol. 284v; a picture in Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 280, fig. 5. For the reading of the Persian signature cf. Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks*, 373-374.

41 MM I, 550-551 (no. 293) = PRK IV, no. 374; Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 255.

The Muslim origin of Antonios was emphasized, although he had taken a detour to the Roman church before his conversion to the Church of Constantinople. The number of these spiritual victories was, however, small in comparison to the losses of bishoprics to the expanding Turkish and especially Ottoman power.

In addition, we possess the document with which Nikolaos Bulgaris, a former Orthodox Christian from Constantinople, declared his return to Christianity before Patriarch Antonios IV and the Synod in July 1391:

I, Nikolaos Bulgaris, declare and promise by my present letter in front of our most holy Lord, the ecumenical Patriarch, and the divine and holy Synod, that I will keep myself from now on in the Orthodox faith of the Christians, and that I reject and condemn the wickedness of the Muslims and all their rites, I assure that I also will bring here my children so that they live in Christianity. And everything I have done from resentment, with involvement of the evil demon, and (that) I went to the Turks and (that) I admired their wickedness, I now reject with God's grace and I promise to observe the Orthodox faith of the Christians.⁴²

The circumstances of Bulgaris' emigration to Turkish territory (he »went to the Turks« as Symeon's brother »went over to the Persians«) and conversion are presented in a vague way. Obviously, he took his children with him or they were born in the Turkish territory. His wife is not mentioned; she could have been dead already or maybe was a Muslim. Yet, as Nevra Necipoğlu has made plausible, the »timing« of his return to Constantinople and Christianity can be connected to recent political as well as ecclesiastical changes: »in September 1390 the revolt of John VII [son of Andronikos IV, who had, in turn, usurped the throne from his father John V between 1376 and 1379] in Constantinople had ended with the restoration of John V [as well as of Patriarch Antonios IV], and, following the latter's death in February 1391, Manuel II had ascended the throne. Conflicts soon picked up between Manuel II and John VII, but for a while it seemed as if the civil wars of the previous two decades were over and that internal peace was on the way to being re-established in Constantinople.«⁴³ Thus, Bulgaris' »resentment«, emigration and conversion were probably caused by a conflict with the secular and/or ecclesiastical authorities in Constantinople.⁴⁴ Illustrative in this respect is a statement made by a priest of the imperial clergy, Konstantinos Kabasilas, and recorded in the Register of the Patriarchate in 1383. After he had been sentenced to deposition by the Synod because of several offences, Kabasilas made a threat that he would defect »to the Franks or to the Turks« if the Synod's verdict was not reversed. Thus, »going over to the Turks« (which actually demanded only crossing the Bosphorus or even just the walls of Constantinople in this period) obviously seemed a plausible option for someone who encountered difficulties in Byzantium.⁴⁵

42 MM II, 155 (no. 425); Darrouzès, Reg. No 2891. The Greek text also in: Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche, 271-272.

43 Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 147-148.

44 Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche, 261-262.

45 MM II, 55 (no. 361/2, September 1383) = PRK V, no. 465; on Kabasilas cf. Kraus, Der Fall des Priesters Konstantinos Kabasilas, 248-263, and Kraus, *Kleriker im späten Byzanz*, 308-311. Cf. also Preiser-Kapeller, Liquid Frontiers.

A parallel case from the Register of the Patriarchate illustrating a relatively flexible approach towards confessional borders is the one of George de Braze, a Genoese living in the commune of Galata/Pera in the north of the Golden Horn: in February 1402, his female slave had sought asylum in the Hagia Sophia because she had been abused by de Braze. In order to get his property returned, he had to promise before the Patriarch not to mistreat the woman again. In addition, we find the following sentence in his promise⁴⁶:

»But if I should do anything like that to her, then I should be fined by the Commune [of Galata] with a hundred nomismata [gold coins] and excommunicated by His Holiness [the Patriarch of Constantinople], if I am an Orthodox [at the time of the malefaction], but if not, then I should be excommunicated by the Pope.«

The background to this clause seems evident, also in the context of other documents we possess. In this period of political and religious upheaval, Latin as well as Orthodox Christians in Constantinople, who were confronted with a threat of punishment, for instance, crossed confessional borders in order to elude the authorities of their original religious community; such a manoeuvre was to be parried in the case of de Braze.⁴⁷ These findings can be connected to later periods of early modern Mediterranean history in the 16th and 17th century, for which »renegades« have become a prominent figure in recent research. Eric R. Dursteler for instance states for the period around 1600:

»A Mediterranean saying of the time suggests still another motivation: ›out of spite [cf. the phrasing in Bulgaris' confession: »from resentment«], I will become a Turk.« Antonio Fabris summarizes well the varied motivations of conversion: ›We are dealing with artisans driven by a yearning for income, with Europeans, slaves of Muslims, desirous of a better life, with men greedy for adventure or in search of a power precluded them in the West.« It is not surprising that periods of increased conversion usually coincided with crises in European society, economic depression, and religious and/or political persecution.«⁴⁸

As motives for conversion Dursteler cites statements such as »to obtain the justice that he felt had been denied him by Christians«; he mentions the avoidance of juridical persecution or the paying of debts – very similar to our findings. He also states: »Although practical economic, social and political catalysts for conversion were common, it would be wrong to overlook the element of sincere belief and of a more transcendent religious conversion. (...) [But] while some people converted out of sincere religious conviction, this was probably not the predominant motivation«.⁴⁹

46 Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 245-246, edition of the text 274-275.

47 Mitsiou and Preiser-Kapeller, *Übertritte zur byzantinisch-orthodoxen Kirche*, 245-246.

48 Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 113.

49 Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 114-117; cf. also Greene, *A Shared World*, 39-44, for the background to conversions on Crete before and after the Ottoman conquest in 1669, and 93-94 esp. for possible motivations of Christian women to convert to Islam.

The counterpart to the motivation to avoid disadvantages within one's original community at 14th century Islamic-(Latin/Byzantine)Christian border zones in Anatolia, south-eastern Europe and the Black Sea were opportunities offered by and within the religious community one was about to join.⁵⁰ The successfully expanding »Ottoman project«, for instance, welcomed those, especially from the aristocratic elite, who joined the ranks of the Sultan, even as Christians, but even more so as Muslims. Heath Lowry and Karen Barkey have highlighted the relevance of this »network building« for the emergence of the Ottoman State in Bithynia and later for its expansion in south-Eastern Europe.⁵¹ Barkey reconstructed the »Ego-networks« of social ties of the first Ottoman rulers (Osman and Orhan) in 14th century Bithynia. She differentiated between Muslims, Christians and converts as well as ties of family or kinship, durable war friendships, religious ties, ties with members of *akhi* religious trade corporations, and also ties of allegiance which were established after a war against the respective individual. She thus demonstrated the contribution of »brokerage« between individuals from Muslim as well as Christian backgrounds for the rise of the first Ottoman rulers, stating: »We can understand the rise of Osman (1290-1324) and his son Orhan (1326-1359) as the leaders of an incipient state in terms of their initial construction of a hub-and-spoke network structure of which they became the centre, as well as the brokerage they initiated among otherwise separated groups and their effective multivocality maintained by the network structure they assembled through their actions«.⁵²

Yet even before this we can observe »the formation of a Christian Seljuk-Komnenian Elite« in 13th century Seljuk Anatolia, as Sara Nur Yıldız has done.⁵³ She illuminates especially the fate of Manuel Komnenos Mavrozomes, a close relative of the Byzantine imperial house of the Komnenoi, and his descendants, who, despite their Christian faith, were important amirs at the Seljuk court of Konya until the end of the 13th century, as Ibn Bibi also informs us. While a daughter of Manuel Mavrozomes was married to Sultan Kaykhusraw I (1192-1196 and 1205-1211), his son married a daughter of the Sultan and became an »intimate confidant of Sultan 'Alā' al-Dīn Kayqubād (1220-1237)«, the son of Kaykhusraw I⁵⁴. This »ongoing pattern of Seljuk integration of Byzantine elites into their imperial households«⁵⁵ partly also provides the background to the most prominent act of conversion from Islam to the Church of Constantinople in the Late Byzantine Period, that of the Seljuk sultan Izzeddin Keykavus II of Konya⁵⁶ and his family. They took refuge in Constantinople at the court of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (who, in turn, had found refuge in Konya in the 1250s before his accession to the throne, but without becoming a Muslim) after a defeat against the Mongols

50 Cf. also Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 489; Preiser-Kapeller, *Liquid Frontiers*.

51 Lowry, *Early Ottoman State*; Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

52 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 28-66.

53 Yıldız, Manuel Komnenos Mavrozomes; cf. also Shukurov, *Oriental margins*.

54 Yıldız, Manuel Komnenos Mavrozomes; Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks*, 105-120.

55 Yıldız, Manuel Komnenos Mavrozomes, 72-73.

56 *PLP* no. 328.

in 1261 and received baptism from the hands of Metropolitan Makarios of Antiocheia (in Pisidia⁵⁷). Equally, the mother of Izzeddin Keykavus II was a Byzantine Greek and the daughter of a priest; his descendants under the name of *Sultanos* were integrated in the Byzantine aristocracy and even became relatives of the imperial house of the Palaiologi.⁵⁸

»Strong« and »weak ties« and »small worlds«

As becomes evident from these examples, opportunities for the crossing of religious borders demanded pre-existing connections *to* and support *within* networks in the new religious community, through which expected benefits of conversion could be guaranteed or promised.⁵⁹ As studies of social networks from pre-modern times have demonstrated, differences between individuals from various social backgrounds not only existed with regard to the number, but also to the range and quality of relationships.⁶⁰ These observations lead to two basic concepts of network theory: the one of »weak and strong ties« and the one of the »small world« character of social networks.

The first concept was developed by Mark S. Granovetter in his article »The Strength of Weak Ties«.⁶¹ He defines the strength of a tie between two persons as the sum of the »amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy and the reciprocal services that characterise the tie« (typical »strong ties« would be found within a family, for instance). Granovetter also hypothesized that within a group of persons to whom either A or B is connected with a social tie, »the stronger the tie between A and B, the larger the proportion of individuals in the group to whom both of them will be tied, on average; since the stronger the tie between two people, the more time they will commit to this relationship. If A is connected to both B and C with strong ties, the chance is great that B and C will also meet and have a social tie of some strength at some point.«⁶² Within network theory, this phenomenon is also called »triadic closure« (Fig. 4).⁶³ »Weak ties«, by contrast, are characterized by less emotional intensity and intimacy and less frequency and duration of interaction (such as an acquaintance whom one

57 *PLP* no. 16271; Laurent, Reg. no. 1367.

58 Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey*, 124, 175, 186-187, 190-191; Melville, *Anatolia under the Mongols*, 59, 63, 68; Yaşar Ocak, *Social, cultural and intellectual life*, 405; Shukurov, *Oriental margins*, 182-186; Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks*, 190-195. For the family of Sultanos cf. also *PLP* no. 26337-26341.

59 Cf. also Greene, *A Shared World*, 42-43, for this phenomenon in 17th century Crete. On historical network analysis and religious dynamics cf. also the conference »Religiöse Differenz und soziale Netzwerke« of the Cluster of Excellence of the universities of Trier und Mainz »Gesellschaftliche Abhängigkeiten und soziale Netzwerke« (www.netzwerk-exzellenz.uni-trier.de/?site_id=111), which took place in June 2010 in Trier: hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3397. Some of these papers were published in: Bauerfeld and Clemens, *Gesellschaftliche Umbrüche und religiöse Netzwerke*.

60 Jullien, *Netzwerkanalyse in der Mediävistik*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Visualising Communities*.

61 Granovetter, *Strength of weak ties*.

62 Cf. also Collar, *Network theory*, 151; Czachesz, *Women, charity and mobility*, 134-138 (from there the citations); Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 76-77.

63 Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 140-147.

meets at professional conferences now and then). Such weak ties are relevant since they can serve as »bridges« between groups which are otherwise unconnected and as channels of information, for instance, which an individual would not have access to within the framework of »strong ties«, as Granovetter has demonstrated in his study for people finding new jobs and as others have for the spread of innovation within professional communities.⁶⁴

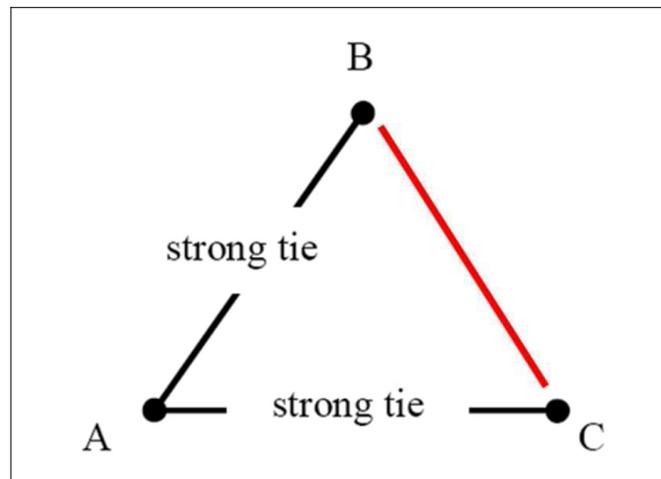


Fig. 4: The concept of the »closure« of triads of nodes within networks of »strong« ties (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

Observations on the topology of social networks partly concur with Granovetter's concept: nodes are often found in close-knit clusters, in which all nodes are connected with each other (by »strong ties«, following Granovetter). Yet, somehow, larger networks do not disintegrate into several smaller networks, but by contrast even maintain a relatively low average path length (the average number of links it takes to get from one node to another within the network). In order to explain this property, Duncan J. Watts and Stephen H. Strogatz created a »small world« model through a »rewiring« of links between nodes on a regular lattice from immediate neighbours to more distant nodes. This resulted in a decrease of clustering within the network (which thus became less »close-knit«), but also in a smaller average path distance between nodes. This model can also be connected with the concept of »scale-free networks« established by Réka Albert and Albert-László Barabási, in which links are not equally distributed among nodes, but most nodes possess a small number of links, while some hubs possess a high number (Fig. 5). These hubs can serve as short cuts within the network.⁶⁵

64 Granovetter, Strength of weak ties; Czachesz, Women, charity and mobility, 134-138; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 76-77.

65 Watts, *Small Worlds*; Albert and Barabási, *Statistical mechanics*; Jackson, *Social and Economic Networks*, 56-65; Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 495-496; Czachesz, Women, charity and mobility, 138-141; Newman, *Networks*, 241-260.

As was also confirmed in empirical analyses of larger social networks, some nodes possess more links and also more links to nodes other nodes are not connected with (which would more likely be »weak ties« after Granovetter); thereby, they can also serve as »social brokers« across »structural holes« between otherwise unconnected clusters and thereby gain »social capital«.⁶⁶

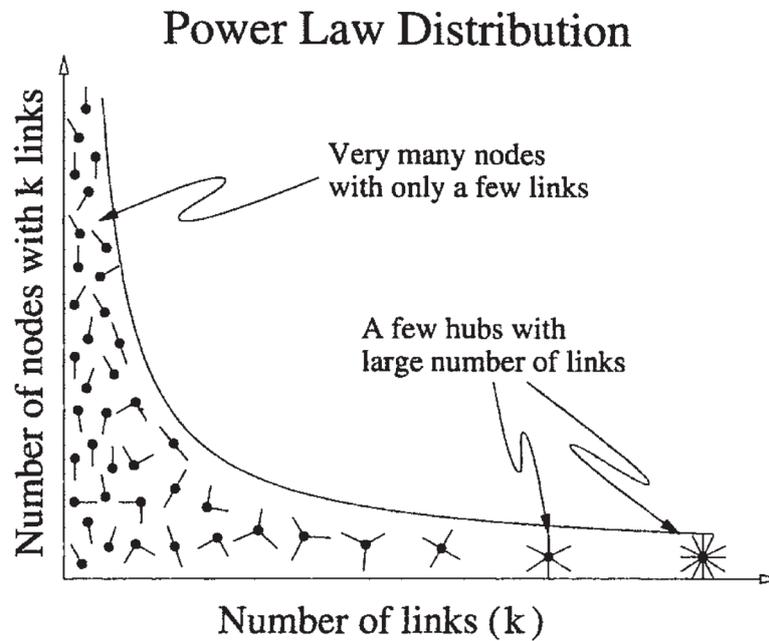


Fig. 5: The unequal distribution of links within »scale-free« networks (source: Preiser-Kapeller, Johannes, Thematic introduction, in: Johannes Preiser-Kapeller and Falko Daim [eds.], *Harbours and Maritime Networks as Complex Adaptive Systems, Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zu den Häfen von der Römischen Kaiserzeit bis zum Mittelalter in Europa 2* [Mainz, 2015] 1-24, fig. 18)

66 Burt, *Brokerage and Closure*; Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 494-495; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 122-128.

Brokers, hubs, commerce and conversion across borders

These models are, of course, ideal types, yet they help us to understand and conceptualize present and past social realities in a better way.⁶⁷ In pre-modern societies, most individuals were still embedded in spatially limited networks of kinship and neighbourhood. At the same time, the emergence of close-knit clusters of nodes connected through »strong ties« is more probable among individuals sharing important markers of identity such as kinship, religious belief or common language (the phenomenon of »homophily«)⁶⁸; in turn, communities tend to reproduce themselves in such networks of high density.⁶⁹ Thus, we observe an interplay between structural (the density of social relations) and qualitative (the homogeneity of individuals) characteristics of social networks.⁷⁰

Members of medieval religious elites and nobilities, in contrast, often established highly selective and supra-regional contacts for various political, familial or economic occasions (some of which, with regard to frequency or intimacy, could be considered as »weak«, but others also as »strong«) with their peers, which also crossed borders within and beyond cultural-religious frontiers.⁷¹

But as the examples of Symeon's brother, Nikolaos Bulgaris or George de Braze have demonstrated, the increase in the number and »intensity« of pre-existing network ties especially of commerce, eased by geographical proximity, also opened up potential paths to border-crossing and conversion for other, non-aristocratic members of society⁷², especially if at the same time ties within the original community were »weakened« through conflicts with authorities, for instance. In commercial terms, the connection to individuals beyond the immediate »close-knit« community, also of other religious backgrounds, could be a priori advantageous; the possibility of attaining a position of brokerage was definitely a competitive edge, for an entire commercial community (such as for the Venetians between Egypt and Western Europe, for instance) as well as for individuals.⁷³ Kate Fleet stated in her study of Genoese and Ottoman trade: »money largely formed the basis of the relationship between the Genoese and the Turks and this, rather than any religious scruple, dictated relations.«⁷⁴

67 Cf. also Schwara, *Kaufleute, Seefahrer und Piraten*, 27-29.

68 McPherson *et al.*, *Birds of a feather*; Newman, *Networks*, 220-231; Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 129-131.

69 For an empirical analysis of modern religious communities, cf. Stroope, *Social networks and religion*. For further application on religious communities, see Everton, *Networks and Religion*, 87-113.

70 Collar, *Network theory*, 151, 154; Fuhse, *Ethnizität, Akkulturation und persönliche Netzwerke*, 78-80; Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 494; Czachesz, *Women, charity and mobility*, 129; Stroope, *Social networks and religion*.

71 Cf. Luhmann, *Interaktion in Oberschichten*; Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 494; Preiser-Kapeller, *Luhmann in Byzantium*; Preiser-Kapeller, *Visualising Communities*.

72 Cf. also Schor, *Conversion by the numbers*, 484: »chemical reactions, like conversion, depend on the probability of interaction«.

73 Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*; Czachesz, *Women, charity and mobility*, 136-137; Schwara, *Kaufleute, Seefahrer und Piraten*, 79-84. For a network analytical approach to this phenomenon, see also Apellániz, *Venetian trading networks*.

74 Fleet, *European and Islamic Trade*, 141.

The case of Tanaïs indicates how hubs within the mercantile networks of the Late Medieval World system⁷⁵ provided, even depended on, opportunities for the establishment of connections across borders.⁷⁶

A further example also illustrates the same phenomenon for other places of interaction between merchants of Byzantine, Latin and Islamic backgrounds. For the middle of the 14th century, we possess, preserved in a manuscript of the Biblioteca Vaticana (Vat. gr. 1325, fols. 316-324), pages of an account book of an anonymous Byzantine merchant. The place where he did business is not mentioned explicitly, but Peter Schreiner as first editor of the text, located the Anonymous in the city of Herakleia Pontike on the Paphlagonian coast of the Black Sea (*Fig. 6*).⁷⁷ While its hinterland had been occupied by Turkish groups since the 1260s, Herakleia remained an »island« under Byzantine control until July 1360, when the Ottomans conquered the city. In addition to Byzantines, since the second half of the 13th century, Genoese and Venetian merchants were active in Herakleia, where the later became the predominant Latin commercial power in the 14th century.⁷⁸ The city of Herakleia could thus serve as a plausible background to the mercantile network documented in the Vat. gr. 1325. David Jacoby, however, on the basis of a different reading of some of the geographical terms and product designations, proposed an identification of the place of activity of the Anonymous with Constantinople itself, which would make the text »highly relevant for the study of the long-distance supplies of the Empire's capital«. ⁷⁹ As the late David Jacoby personally communicated to the authors, his interpretation has since also been accepted by Peter Schreiner himself.

75 Cf. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*.

76 Cf. for instance also Bennassar and Bennassar, *Les Chrétiens d'Allah*, 195-209, for the places of origin of 172 French converts to Islam in the period 1560 and 1665, who came predominantly from coastal cities integrated into commercial webs with the Mediterranean.

77 Schreiner, *Texte zur spätbyzantinischen Finanz- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 34-65.

78 Belke, *Paphlagonien und Honōrias*, 210-211; Preiser-Kapeller, *Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz*, 147-150.

79 Jacoby, *Mediterranean food and wine*, 127-148, esp. 145-147.



Fig. 6: Constantinople, Herakleia Pontike and several places mentioned in the anonymous account book in Vat. gr. 1325, fols. 316-324 (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

The (thus most probably Constantinopolitan) account book is preserved for the period September-October of either 1357 or 1363. During this period, the Anonymous traded various commodities with 118 individuals; for some he also indicated their religious («Musulmanos») or ethnic background («Turkos»), others we can identify on the basis of their names («Mustaphas», «Machmutes», but also «Boris» or «Phrantziskos»). In addition, the Anonymous referred to some of his trading partners with nicknames such as *Kolokythokephalos* («Pumpkin-head») or *Kleptomanoles* («thievish Manuel»), but none of these provides clear hints at ethnicity or religion.⁸⁰ In total, we observe the Anonymous of 1357/1363 in Constantinople embedded in a predominantly Byzantine or «Greek» commercial «small world», in which some individuals of Latin, Muslim and other origin were integrated (Fig. 7). Some of these persons we encounter in a more important position as «brokers» (see above) in the network between the Anonymous and other merchants, such as Machmutes (PLP no. 94127) who established the connection with a certain Gabras (PLP no. 93291), or Turkos («the Turk», PLP no. 29185) who traded with the Anonymous as well as with Glykys (PLP no. 93354) and Adeniates (PLP no. 93028), who, in turn, were both part of larger companies of merchants.

80 Schreiner, *Texte zur spätbyzantinischen Finanz- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 37-55.

This commercial web illustrates network structures which could have provided footholds for a crossing of religious borders.

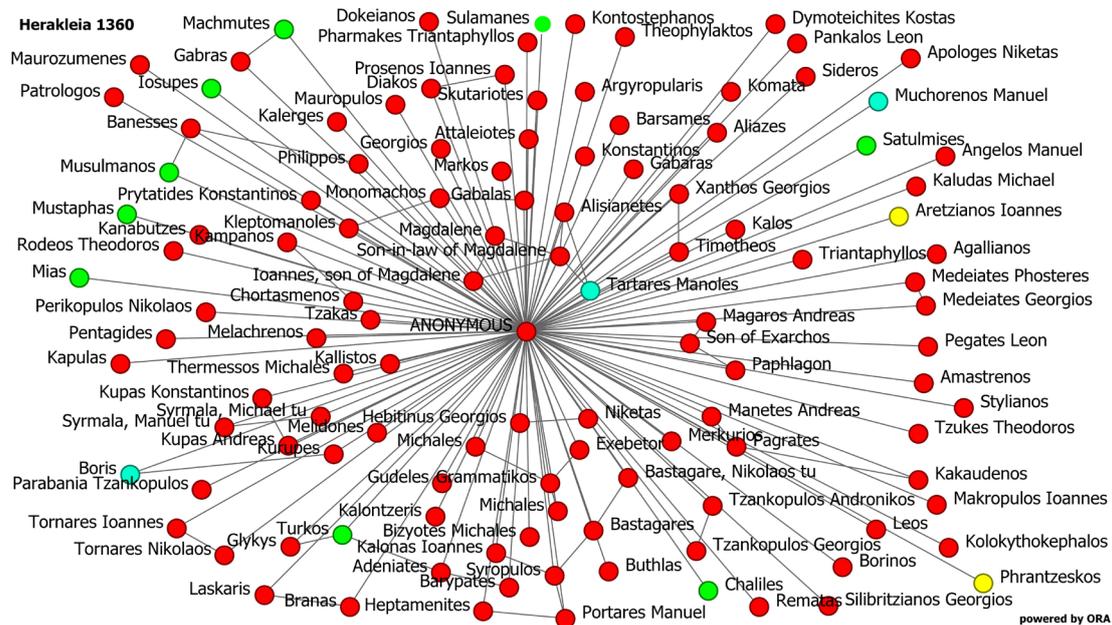


Fig. 7: The trading network (119 nodes) of the Anonymous in Vat. gr. 1325, fols. 316-324 in 1357/1363 (Byzantines: red; Latins: yellow; Muslims: green; Russians: blue); data from: Schreiner, *Texte zur spätbyzantinischen Finanz- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 37-55 (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

For the years 1436 to 1440, we can reconstruct another trading network, this time of a Venetian merchant named Giacomo Badoer in Constantinople, again on the basis of his (much more extensive) account books (Fig. 8). Badoer's network included 74 Byzantines, among these many members of the Byzantine aristocracy up to the imperial family of the Palaiologoi, as well as a group of 12 »Turchi« (as he calls them), Ottoman merchants active in Constantinople and doing business with Byzantines as well as Italians.⁸¹ In addition, also several Greek inhabitants of towns already under Ottoman rule were active in trade with Constantinople, while merchants from Constantinople »made trips to important commercial centers of the Ottomans«.⁸² Nevra Necipoğlu states: »The picture that emerges is one of relatively busy trade, overland and by sea, between the Byzantine capital and Ottoman territories, both in the Balkans and in Asia Minor. Ottoman merchants, whether of Turkish, Greek, or other origin, were able to participate in this trade by going in person to Constantinople, while their Byzantine counterparts were admitted simultaneously into various Ottoman towns.«⁸³

81 Bertelè, *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer*; cf. also Mitsiou, *Feinde, Freunde, Konkurrenten*.

82 Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 205.

83 Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 205.

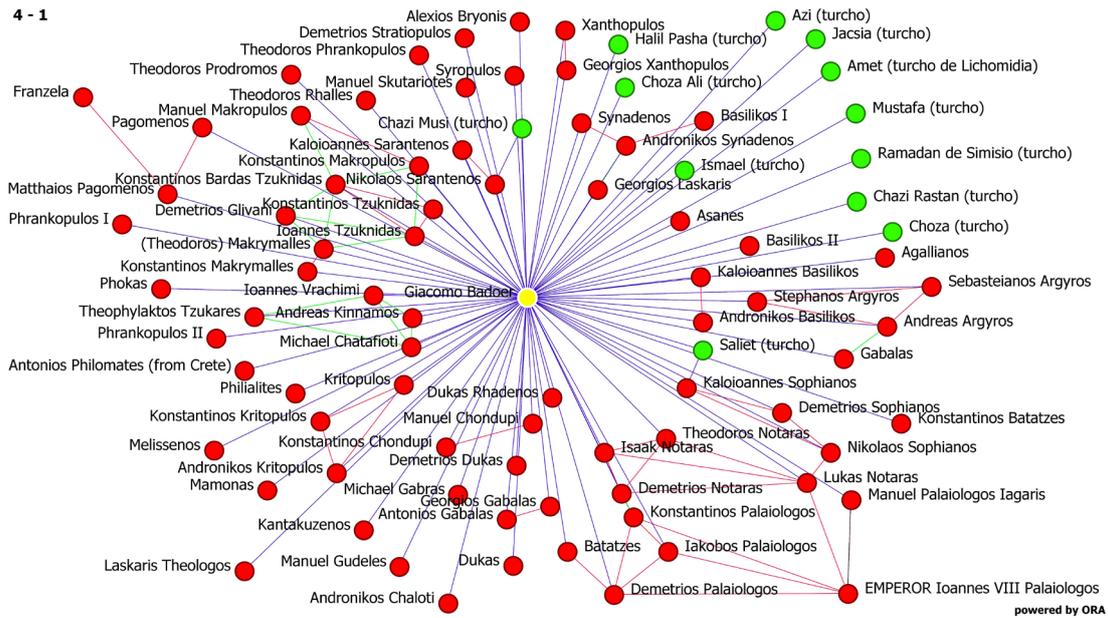


Fig. 8: The trading network (88 nodes) of the Venetian merchant Giacomo Badoer among Byzantines (red) and »Turchi« (green) in Constantinople, 1436-1440: blue = business, green = economic partnership, red = kinship, black = other connections (data from: Bertelè, *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer*) (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

Again, this interaction lead to the integration of Muslims in the commercial networks of Byzantines. The »turcho« Saliè we find, for instance, associated with the prominent family of Sophianos (*PLP* nr. 26406, 26412), who, in turn, was related to and a trading partner of the even more prominent Notaras-family (*PLP* nr. 20730)⁸⁴, whose members occupied the highest positions at the imperial court (*Fig. 9*). The interconnections between this milieu of »aristocratic entrepreneurship«, as Klaus-Peter Matschke has called it⁸⁵ and commercial (as well as political) circles of the Venetians and Genoese as well as of the Ottoman state predated the conquest of 1453. After the fall of Constantinople, many of these »Greek entrepreneurs« were able to maintain these networks and profit from them within the new imperial framework. Some members of these families emigrated to the West and became citizens of Venice or Genoa as well as Catholics, some remained in Constantinople as Orthodox Christians, and some also converted to Islam, such as Andronikos-Mustafa Kantakuzenos, who served as a tax farmer in 1481; but familial and commercial ties across religious border were partly sustained. We encounter partnerships between such Orthodox entrepreneurs

84 On the Notaras see esp. Ganchou, *Le rachat des Notaras*.

85 Matschke, *Some merchant families*; Matschke and Tinnfeld, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz*, 158-220.

and newly converted Muslims for the purpose of bidding for tax farming in the later 15th century, among these members of the former imperial clan of the Palaiologoi, from which some individuals, as converts, also held high positions at Mehmed's II court.⁸⁶ Here, finally, the above-mentioned aristocratic network-building coincided with the potential of commercial ties as a basis for conversion.

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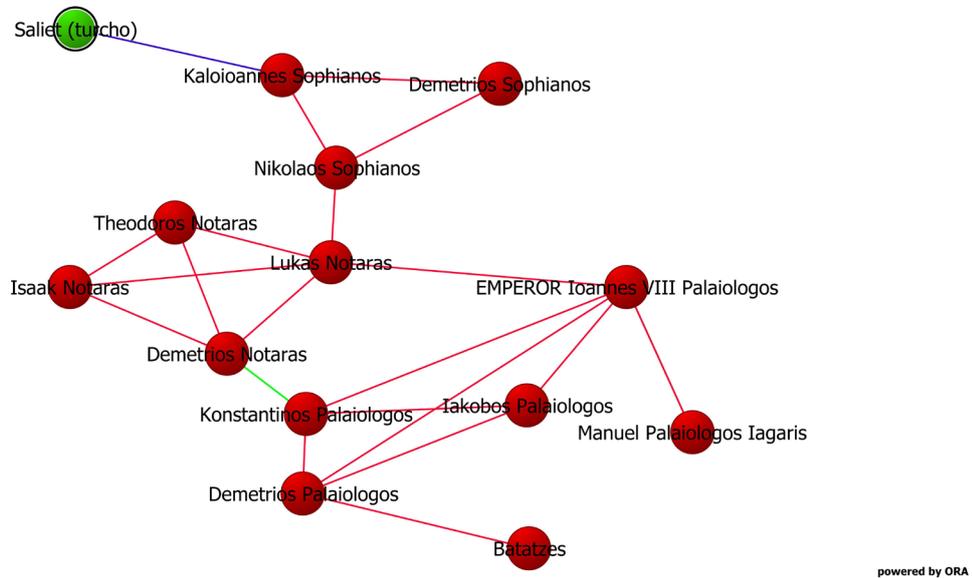


Fig. 9: The connection of the »turcho« Saliel with the families of Sophianos and Notaras within the trading network of Giacomo Badoer, 1436-1440; colours of ties as per Fig. 8 (image: Preiser-Kapeller and Mitsiou, 2018).

Equally, we again encounter phenomena similar to those observed for the early modern Mediterranean; Dursteler for instance states: »Not infrequently renegades maintained close economic ties with their families, and Scaraffia speaks of Euro-Barbaresque family businesses that saw members of the same family, in part renegades in part Christians, involved in the same business.«⁸⁷ Thus, conversion did not necessarily imply a total »disentanglement«

86 Matschke, Some merchant families; Matschke and Tinnefeld, *Die Gesellschaft im späten Byzanz*, 218-220; Necipoğlu, *Byzantium*, 227-230; Inalcik, *Greeks*, esp. 312-315.

87 Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 114.

of individuals from the close-knit web of »strong ties« within their original community, but could rather contribute to an »entanglement« of previously not or less (or »weakly«) connected networks across religious borders; in addition, the potential and benefits of a broker-age position established thereby become visible.⁸⁸

Conclusion

As we tried to demonstrate: in many cases, the application of concepts and findings of network theory (even without the use of quantitative models, since the source evidence is too fragmentary) provides new frameworks for the description of religious conversion across and along Islamic-Christian borders.

Dursteler states: »If religion was one of the most important constituent parts of identity in the pre-modern world, then the presence of so many who traversed boundaries of belief suggests the malleability of even this aspect of identity.«⁸⁹ This »malleability« may become less surprising if one takes into consideration the interplay between social networks (the structure, frequency, density and intensity of connections and possibilities of interaction) and the reproduction, confirmation and modification of religious identities. As Anna Collar explained: »The ideology of a religion will always be part of the explanation of conversion. However, regardless of the persuasiveness of an ideology, or the transcendence of a vision, conversion does not happen in a social vacuum.«⁹⁰

The multiplication of border zones due to the political and especially also commercial dynamics within the late medieval Eastern Mediterranean provided ample opportunities for the establishment of »weak« and even »strong« ties between individuals, families and groups of different backgrounds. These individuals may have diverged with regard to significant »markers« of identity such as religious belief, but may also have shared important aspects of their »Lebenswelten« (their »lifeworlds«), as Şevket Küçüküseyin employed this term for his analysis of texts from late medieval Anatolia.⁹¹ At the same time, the potential of »brokerage« across such borders (beyond or within a society) in particular increased the

88 Cf. also Greene, *A Shared World*, 106-108, for similar phenomena on 17th century Crete. Also the »return« of Nikolaos Bulgaris to Christianity (see above) indicates that he did not cut all ties to his former community in Constantinople. It would be worthwhile to analyse within this framework also similar phenomena for rural areas, and if and how the frequent (and peaceful) encounter between Byzantine farmers and Turcoman nomads, for instance, which we observe in the Maeander Valley in western Asia Minor across the Byzantine-Seljuk frontier in the 12th and 13th century contributed to an establishment of such connections even before the Turkish takeover in the region at the end of the 13th/the beginning of the 14th century, cf. Thoneman, *The Maeander Valley*. But this is beyond the scope of the present study. This observation of »entanglement« is, as we have already seen, of course also true especially for the higher stratum of society: as Heath Lowry was able to show, individuals of Christian elite origin were almost predominant even in the highest ranks of Ottoman functionaries in the first decades after the fall of Constantinople 1453; many of these persons continued their contacts with their families, thus serving as »brokers« between the imperial centre and the old elites in the Balkan provinces, cf. Lowry, *Early Ottoman State*.

89 Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*, 113.

90 Collar, *Network theory*, 157. Cf. also her monograph Collar, *Religious Networks*.

91 Küçüküseyin, *Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung*, 11-31. On shared »Lebenswelten« with regard to food production and food consumption, see Trépanier, *Foodways and Daily Life*, esp. 105-120. Cf. also Preiser-Kapeller, *Liquid Frontiers*, on several aspects of contacts across the political and religious frontiers of late medieval Asia Minor.

benefits of such connections, especially if they provided access to individuals and groups of power and prestige.⁹² The establishment of such interconnections does not necessarily imply a high degree of »strategic« network building;⁹³ circumstances may simply have very much suggested or even necessitated cross-border relations or even the conversion of individuals within a family or community (see the cases of »Neo-Ottomans« through *devşirme*, who then maintained connections to their families of birth).⁹⁴ In any case, social networks provided opportunities or constraints, which constituted the background to conversion and the crossing of borders.

For the future, the analysis and depiction of such entangled phenomena necessitate more intensive efforts to write an *entangled history* or an *histoire croisée* beyond geographical, religious and especially disciplinary borders,⁹⁵ in which specialists from various disciplines combine their knowledge, sources, language skills and methods in order to »re-combine« the elements which constituted the background of such cross-border interactions. New journals such as *Medieval Worlds* may provide the ideal platform for such undertakings.

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92 Cf. also Prell, *Social Network Analysis*, 125.

93 For precautions in this regard cf. also Lemerrier, *Formale Methoden der Netzwerkanalyse*, 22-23.

94 See also Popović, *Kaiser, Zar und Sultan*.

95 Werner and Zimmermann, *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée*; Schwara, *Kaufleute, Seefahrer und Piraten*, 19-20; Hodder, *Entangled*, also on entanglements between humans and material objects.

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