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The 14th - 15th Century Genoese Colonies on the Black Sea

17:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 2, 2013
CEU–Faculty Tower #409
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The thirteenth to fifteenth centuries were times of significant economic and social progress in the history of Europe. The development of industry and urban growth, the increasing role of trade and the increase in geographical knowledge resulted in an époque of Italian colonial expansion. The Italian maritime republics, Genoa and Venice, became cradles of capitalism and represent an early modern system of international long-distance trade. Besides being the motherland of capitalism, Italy also introduced the phenomenon of colonialism into European, and indeed world, history, since the patterns and models established by Italian colonialists later influenced the colonial experiences of other nations in the époque of Great Geographic Discoveries. Both Genoa and Venice conducted long-distance trade, relying on a network of colonies and trading stations, disseminated mainly in the Levantine and Black Sea area, which were always a crossroads and a contact zone of civilizations because of its geographical location. The latter was extremely important from a commercial point of view if the Ligurian republic was to expand – this is why Genoa was particularly focused on the region of the Black Sea. The city of Caffa (now known as Theodosia) on the Crimean Black Sea coast lay at the centre of the Genoese network of colonies, trading stations and overseas domains situated far from the metropolis. Caffa was the biggest centre of commerce in the Black Sea and was an outpost that played a pivotal role in the Genoese system of



Self-portrait of notary Giacomo from Venice (ASV. NT. 733;
notario Iacobus quondam Guglielmi de Veneciis, capellanus ecclesie Sancti Simeoni)

international long-distance trade. From its emergence around 1260s – 1270s and up to its fall to the Ottomans in 1475, the city was the main Genoese pivot in the area. This resulted in the emergence of a mixed and cosmopolitan ethnic and cultural environment that gave birth to a new multicultural society comprising features characteristic of Western Europe, the Mediterranean area and the Near East as well as those of Central and Eastern Europe. The history of these societies and cultures may be regarded as one of the histories of unrealized potentials of intercultural exchange that began with the penetration of Italians to the Black Sea basin and stopped soon after the Ottoman conquest of Crimea. The city of Caffa, which is in the centre of this presentation, can be fruitfully studied manifold, being a frontier zone for the Latin Christendom and a contact zone for many cultures and civilizations. In this sense Caffa reflected most entirely the essence of Mediterranean, and through the lense of Caffa we can see the Mediterranean world as a whole in the époque prior to the Great Discoveries.

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