

Economic Mobility of Eastern Anatolia in the Byzantine Period

Ahmet Cuneydi Has

The Byzantine Empire, whose capital was the city of Constantinople (fig. 1) during the Middle Ages, dominated the three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa, geographically the most important strategic regions of the world from its foundation to its collapse.¹ Since the time of Emperor Justinian I,² the borders of the country, which has been expanding since the time of the Middle Ages, has gained enemies in every period (fig. 2). From Antalya to the south, to Egypt, to the Caucasus and Armenia to the east, to the south to southern Italy and Spain, which was reached during the reign of Basileios (fig. 3).³ Although the borders have expanded to the Tigris Valley in the east of Anatolia, they have never been fixed.⁴

It entered a period of rapid pause with the Imperial dynasty of the Komnenos. Only the northwest of Anatolia, Thrace, part of Macedonia and the Straits remained of the Eastern Roman Empire. The Empire was erased from the stage of history by the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 15th century.

Economy

One of the two major sources of the economic system of the Byzantine Empire was the Roman Empire and the other one was Anatolia. The Anatolian peninsula was a transit trade zone that connects Asia to Europe and consists of regions with natural resources and different climates. In this respect, the Byzantine Empire was located in the region where the Silk and Spice roads reached the Mediterranean by connecting east-west economies. The state has advantageously used this position and has managed to have a say in world trade in every period. Even when the government's control over the economy loosened, private enterprises came to the forefront.

Important commercial points around Anatolia during the Byzantine Empire are: from land, in Tabriz in Iran, in Baghdad in Iraq, in Damascus in Syria; from the sea, there were Alexandria in Egypt, the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean, Crimea in the north of the Black Sea, and the ports of Sinop, Samsun and Trabzon. These main points were connected by three main routes. The first one is the east-west route, the second is the north-south route, and the third is the diagonal route that connects the southeast with Istanbul. While the loss of Italy, the Balkans and Armenia in the periods of the disintegration of the Empire did not affect it economically, the weakening of trade with Syria, Egypt and Africa for political reasons seriously damaged the economy of the Byzantine Empire.⁵



Fig. 1: Constantinople City.

Themas (fig. 5),⁶ which was estimated to have emerged during the period of I. Justinian (527–565 AD), when it was first established, expressed the provinces where the armies were established, but later assumed the role of controlling the economic and political administration.⁷ These commanders were workers at the time of war and peasants in peacetime. Sivil Strategos ”was a semi-civilian governor. In this context, the val Limitanei ra (Border governor), which was placed in the Roman border regions of the Themas, was similar to the military system of the land.⁸

The security of the Byzantine Empire and the dominance of the small regions provided the opportunity to recognize the dominance of small states.⁹ The conquests changed the region’s strategic and political geography, and the outpost and garrison system



Fig. 2: The History of the Empire.



Fig. 3: II. Basileios Age (976–1025).

(border guard) were monitored along the eastern border. Herakleios' Armeniakon covers the region of Armeniak, eastern Anatolia. The Armeniakon command occupied

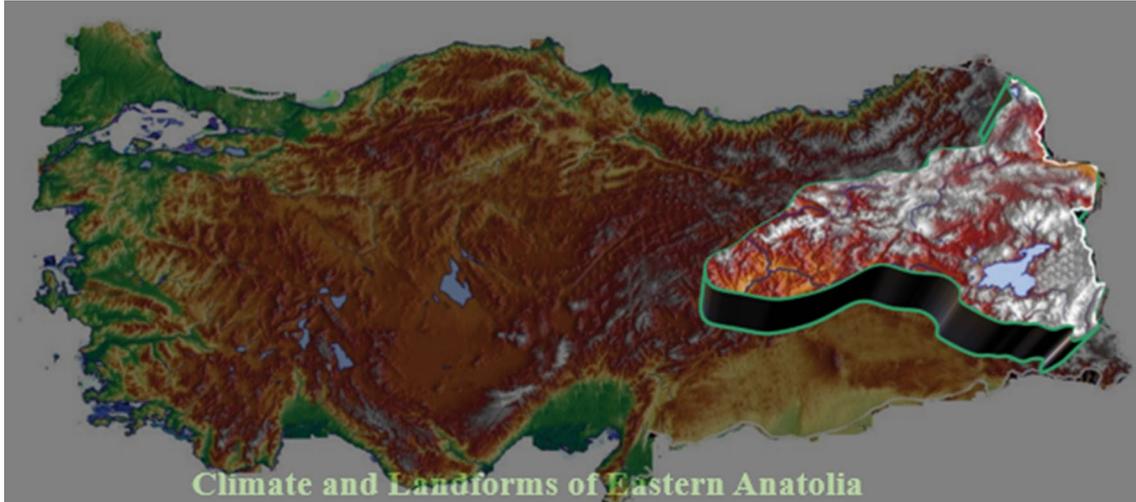


Fig. 4: Climate and Landforms os Eastern Anatolia.

the eastern and northern regions of Anatolia.¹⁰ In fact, the region has generally placed its commercial role as a buffer zone and its military role in the military – administrative aspect.¹¹ This administrative system, which emphasized the political importance of the Eastern Anatolia Region in particular, was to provide control. In addition to the ongoing economic links between the east and the west, these traces were also important in the transition to the Holy Land.¹²

The Byzantine Empire in the Mediterranean, Aegean and Marmara regions, which are in the west of Anatolia and on the seaside, economy is generally active. He was able to maintain his sovereignty in the political and military spheres. This feature of the Eastern Anatolia Region due to difficult climate and ground shapes could not use enough. The fact that Sasanis and the Arabs started to be influential in the region was the most important factor in this, it became a transit area and fell into a passive situation.¹³ But the political problems and conflicts between the Byzantine Empire and Arab thread did not enitirely complete the existing trade. Struggle with Sasanis, in particular, forced the Byzantine trade between Asia and Europe from the north of Eastern Anatolia to different commercial links with the Göktürks and the Khazars in Central Asia.

Using the Byzantine political and military power, it pursued the policy of maintaining all commercial products in its own geography. He tried to achieve this by using his strategic position effectively in every period. Starting from the end of the 7th century, all European trade was passing through Constantinople, a capital port that fulfilled its duty as a transit port and terminal.¹⁴ The capital was Europe's richest and largest city from the 7th century to the 13th century.¹⁵ The Eastern Anatolia Region has always assumed the same role as the highway in this period and after.

Although it was not as influential as Rome, it used commercial means and chose to collect more taxes. This tax collection system was based on the right to work in the right direction of the soil and labor, although it was not successful in later and was carried



Fig. 5: Development of the Byzantium Themes.

out in scattered ways.¹⁶ The most important factor was the loss of land under the control of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁷

The geography of the Eastern Anatolia Region has not always shown itself in the same way everywhere, and has created differences in the forms of land, climate, vegetation, variety and quantity of production (fig. 4). However, these products were mainly produced by agriculture and animal husbandry, reflecting the characteristics of the region. Special craft branches such as forging, leatherwork and carpentry, which are specialized in rural areas of the region, are also seen. In this period, the mining industry was at the forefront of the Anatolian economy but we learned from the Armenian and Arabian sources that it was not used as effectively as the Romans'. In spite of this, the commercial policy of the Roman world has not been completely eradicated, but it has contributed to the trade.¹⁸

The hinterland of the agricultural economy along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was filled with mountain and lowland settlements and had strategic importance.¹⁹ Towards the end of the 4th century, Armenia was shared between the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanids (Persians). Karin (Erzurum), Erez (Erzincan) and Elazığ were included in the Byzantine Empire.²⁰ But the empire was not only in conflict with the Sassanid and Arabs in the east, but also with the Avars in the west, and it affected Eastern Anatolia,²¹ both economically and politically.

In the beginning of Byzantine history, rare luxury items were mostly imported from the east, jewelry from India and Iran, and silk from China.²² Such luxury goods were

state monopoly, especially the workshops where they were working close to the center where both men and women worked.

Although the most important commercial products of the empire were grain and silk, the number of goods traded in Istanbul and other provinces of the empire was quite high. The most important ones are olive oil, wine, salty fish, meat, vegetables, salt, timber, carpet, wax, ceramic, wood and linen.²³ In addition, luxury items such as perfumes and spices, as well as slave trade was intense. Mine, ceramic, textile, glass, silk, ivory, gold and silver works were evaluated as a secondary production to manufacturing and craftsman.

This region has been an important transit point between the east and west of the commercial goods during the Byzantine Empire period, as in every period. It has played an important role in supplying products from the far east and the east to the capital Constantinople. The role of the soil and the harsh climate have been important in assuming this role. But the struggles that took place with the Sassanids and the Arabs from time to time caused negative results in the region as well as economically. The Eastern Anatolia Region, which is close to the disintegration phase of the Empire, has emerged from the sovereignty of the state and lost its importance.

It is to better understand and evaluate the commercial life of the Byzantine Anatolian Caucasus and the Islamic world in the east; the south coast, the Aegean Islands and the Greek world with Constantinople.

Notes

¹This subject has been discussed more comprehensively in Turkish in L.G. Gökçek – E. Yildirim – O. Pekşen, *Economic and Agricultural Life in the Ancient Ages of the Anatolia* (Istanbul 2018) 459–544. – Bayness – Moss 1953, 63.

²Evans 1970, 218–223 .

³Ostragorsky 1986, 292; Lemerle 1965, 95.

⁴Decker 2007, 221.

⁵Treadgold 1997, 402.

⁶Güçlüay 2013, 161.

⁷Rosser 1984, 383.

⁸Decker 2007, 217; Haldon 2005, 117; Gregory 2005, 362.

⁹Honigmann 1970, 145.

¹⁰Haldon 2005, 117; Lemerle 1965, 77.

¹¹Bamyacı – Güçlüay 2018, 284.

¹²Bamyacı – Güçlüay 2018, 284.

¹³Decker 2007, 217; Lemerle 1965, 95; Vasiliev 1962, 303.

¹⁴Bayness – Moss 1953, 70.

¹⁵Harrison 1900, 13.

¹⁶Haldon 2005, 126.

- ¹⁷ Bamyacı – Güçlüay 2018, 284.
¹⁸ Laiou 2002, 1133.
¹⁹ Gregory 2005, 84.
²⁰ Sağır 2014, 184.
²¹ Bamyacı – Güçlüay 2018, 286.
²² Lemerle 1965, 66.
²³ Bahar 2011, 182.

Image Credits

Fig. 1-2: <<http://www.britannica.com/>>. – Fig. 3: <<http://www.quora.com/>>. – Fig. 4: <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%BCrkiye_co%C4%9Frafyas%C4%B1>. – Fig.5: <<http://www.hellenicaworld.com>>.

References

Bahar 2011

H. Bahar, Roma ve Bizans Tarihi, Kömen Yayınları (Konya 2012).

Bamyacı – Güçlüay 2018

M. E. Bamyacı – S. Güçlüay, İmparator Herakleios Dönemi (610–641) Bizans İmparatorluğu'nun Genel Ekonomisi ve Ticaret Politikası, *The Journal of International Social Sciences* 8, 2018, 281–288.

Baynes-Boss 1953

N. H. Baynes – L. B. Boss, *Byzantium an Introduction to East Roman Civilization* (London 1953).

Decker 2007

M. Decker, Frontier Settlement and Economy in the Byzantine East, *DOP* 61, 2007, 217–267.

Evans 1970

J. A. S Evans, Justinian and the Historian Procopius, *GaR* 17, 1970, 218–223.

Gregory 2005

T. E. Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* (Oxford 2005).

Güçlüay 2013

S. Güçlüay, Bizans İmparatorluğunda Toprak Sistemi İçerisinde Themalar (IV–VII. Yüzyıllar), in: Fırat Üniversitesi Ortadoğu Araştırmaları Merkezi, *Ortadoğu Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Ocak, 2011 (Elazığ 2013) 63–89.

Haldon 2005

J. Haldon, *The Palgrave Atlas of Byzantine History* (London 2005).

Harrison 2007

F. Harrison, *Byzantine History in the Early Middle Ages* (Toronto 2007).

Honigman 1970

E. Honigman, *Eastern Border of the Byzantine State* (Istanbul 1970).

Laiou 2002

A. E. Laiou, *The Economic History of Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 39 (Washington 2002).

Lemerle 1965

P. Lemerle, *Histoire de Byzance* (Paris 1965).

Ostrogorsky 1986

G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Jersey 1986).

Rosser 2001

J. H. Rosser, *Historical Dictionary of Byzantium* (New Jersey 2001).

Sağır 2014

G. Sağır, *Bizans İmparatorluğu Dönemi'nde Anadolu'da Ermeni Yerleşimleri*, in: Metin Hülagü (ed.), *Tarihte Türkler ve Ermeniler: İlkçağ ve Ortaçağ* (Ankara 2014) 183–205.

Treadgold 1997

W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (California 1997).

Vasiliev 1952

A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324–1453* (Wisconsin 1952).