

MEDALEX Result In Brief

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Cooperating trade communities

An EU team studied the interactions of various mediaeval commercial groups. Using records from 'outremer' notaries, the project reconstructed Alexandrian mercantile life to illustrate broader Mediterranean networking and cooperative patterns.



During the Late Middle Ages various groups shared the commercial areas of Mediterranean cities. The groups, whether defined by place of origin or religious affiliation, generally cooperated via shared networks.

The EU-funded project MEDALEX (Cooperating in complex environments: Cross-cultural trade, commercial networks and notarial culture in Alexandria (Egypt): 1360-1450) examined the dynamics of such groups. The plan was to study one entire merchant community, in Alexandria, to determine factors affecting business cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The source of data was outremer notaries and their registers; the term means overseas from Egypt, particularly the Crusader states of the north-east Mediterranean. Such records reflect the complex activities of the diverse community. MEDALEX ran for two years to August 2014.

Major findings tested the capacity of individuals to build networks under the prevailing political and other circumstances of the period. The project traced the emergence of an inter-group cooperation. Apparently, such cooperation was fuelled by the frequency with which key network players transgressed social norms and other boundaries.

Conversely, biases towards minorities forced continual shifting among networks. Analysis of the interactions suggests that European and Islamic institutions were not as conflicted as widely believed.

The project yielded a set of four main papers. One examines decentralised economic and banking networks of the Renaissance. A second challenges the supposed cultural divide between Christians and Muslims. The most important considers the legal foundations of the observed cooperation. The final paper traces the evolution of the Alexandrian business community. Besides the four planned papers, project researchers also produced one other article.

MEDALEX contributed a new understanding of Mediaeval Mediterranean trade and contributing social networks.

Related information

Report Summary

[Final Report Summary - MEDALEX \(Cooperating in Complex Environments: Cross-cultural Trade, Commercial Networks and Notarial Culture in Alexandria \(Egypt\) : 1360-1450\)](#)

Subjects

[Scientific Research](#)

Keywords

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