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SILK PRODUCTS OF AZERBAIJAN IN INTERNATIONAL TRANSIT TRADE (XVII-XVIII CENTURIES)

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Abstract

Azerbaijani cities, located on an important transit trade route between Europe and Asia, have long played an important role in the political and economic life of the countries of Europe and the Middle East. The trade route in the southern region of Azerbaijan (Tabriz–Marend-Julfa-Nakhchivan–Turkiye–Europe) was one of the main routes of transit trade between Europe and Asia. In the eastern direction, the roads led to Isfahan–Bandar Abbas (Hormuz), and from there by sea to India. Medieval documents confirm the transportation of raw silk from Shamakhi to the Ottoman state, Baghdad and Basra, and from there to England. The silk industry, established in Russia during the reign of Peter the Great, was largely dependent on raw materials imported from the Caspian countries.

Shamakhi, Sheki, Aresh, Karabakh, and Ganja played an important role in the raw silk trade. High-quality Azerbaijani silk was supplied to the Ottoman Empire, Russia, Poland, and Western European countries through these territories.

Keywords: International trade, cities of Azerbaijan, trade in the Middle Ages, European-Asian trade, Eastern trade

The modern world economic system is accompanied by the intensification of trade relations between countries. The expansion and deepening of trade relations between countries encourages the conclusion of trade agreements. The participation of States in international integration processes undoubtedly has a positive impact on the development of the national economy. In this regard, the study of the history of international trade does not lose its relevance.

Information about the economic situation, domestic and foreign trade of Azerbaijani cities in the Middle Ages is reflected to a certain extent in the works of many researchers. Many researchers interested in the history of the East cite in their works interesting facts about the Volga-Caspian trade route, about the cities of Azerbaijan playing an intermediary role between Europe and the countries of the East. Researchers of N.Kukanova, S.Burnashev, V.Yakovtsevsky, A.Huseynov, E.Zevakin in their works also focus on the production and trade of silk [11;5;27;8;9]. The scientific work of M.Heydarov, the author of several research papers on the domestic and foreign trade of Azerbaijan in the period under study, can be particularly noted. In his works, he attaches great importance to the trade of Azerbaijan with many countries, the organization of the customs and tax system [7]. Trade issues of the XVII-XVIII centuries also took place in the scientific works of Ch. Kurbanova, A. Semenov, T. Mustafazade [12;22;15].

Azerbaijan, located on the transit trade route from Europe to Asia, has long played an important role in the political and economic life of the countries of Europe and the Middle East. It is for this reason that the Persians, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols who occupied Azerbaijani cities did not destroy bridges on trade routes, did

not interfere with the restoration and construction of caravanserais in the right places. In the XVI-early XVII century, Azerbaijani raw silk was one of the most important products of international trade. In the 30s of the XVII century, a small state, Holstein, joined the struggle for Azerbaijani (as well as Gilan) raw silk. Weak in comparison with Dutch, English, and French trading companies, the German company sought to streamline its trade with the countries of the East using the Volga-Caspian route. The Holstein representative office, which included A. Oleari and A. Mendelson, appealed to the rulers of the Russian and Safavid states with a statement of intentions to import raw silk from Azerbaijan and Iran through the Volga and the Caspian Sea to Moscow, and from there through the Baltic Sea to their countries. [23, pp.150-154]. However, a number of economic and political factors do not allow this plan to be implemented.

During this period, the Ottoman state received large customs revenues from the main product of international transit trade, raw cotton. For this reason, the trade in raw silk was accompanied by the Ottoman-Safavid struggle, and these wars destroyed Azerbaijani cities that had received significant development due to trade. This product, sold locally for 8 shillings per pound, was sold on the London market for 12, and sometimes 26-27 shillings [12, pp.59-60]. During the reign of Shah Abbas I, the Ottoman-Safavid struggle for the main routes of international transit trade became more fierce. Shah Abbas I sought to deprive Ottoman Turkiye of these revenues, redirect the main route of international trade from the Ottoman territory to the south of Iran–to the Persian Gulf, and from there to Hormuz and European countries. Indeed, at the beginning of the XVII century, Shah Abbas I ensured that

Iranian and Azerbaijani raw silk was sent to Europe by this route [16, p.278]. Undoubtedly, an important role in achieving Shah Abbas's goal was played by his protection by the British and Dutch East India Companies. In turn, Shah Abbas I, by his decree of 1621, granted significant privileges to British merchants. [7, p.71]. After that, they could buy raw silk first-hand. It should be noted that this right was granted to local merchants only after the death of Shah Abbas I in 1629, by Shah Safi I [2, p.77].

Based on the data from sources on the state of transit routes, it can be said that the result achieved by Shah Abbas I did not remain stable. The easing of political tensions and the establishment of long-term peace between the Safavid state and the Ottoman Empire contributed to the return of the importance of the trade route in the southern region of Azerbaijan in the 30-40s of the XVII century. This road (from Tabriz–Marend-Julfa-Nakhchivan–Turkiye–Europe) has again become the main route of transit trade Europe-Asia [7, p.57]. In the West, the main departure points of the European-Asian caravan trade were Istanbul, Izmir and Aleppo. In the city of Togat of the Ottoman Empire, roads from Izmir and Istanbul converged, from here they diverged in different directions. The main line of the transit route to the East was as follows: Erzurum–Yerevan - Nakhichevan - Azadabad - Marand - Tabriz - Ardabil - Qazvin - Qom – Kashan - Isfahan-Bandar Abbas (Hormuz), and from there by sea to India [2, p.78].

Since trade was one of the most profitable areas of activity in the Middle Ages, the warring states agreed not to interfere with the movement of trade caravans. J. Hanway wrote that the Iranians and Turks received such income from trade that they even made an agreement that they should not attack trade caravans even during wars [26, p.17]. This shows how trade occupies an important place in the economic life of countries. The cessation of trade during the war, although temporary, had a negative impact on the income of the parties concerned. The establishment of long-term peaceful relations between the Safavids and the Ottomans (from the 30s of the XVII century to the beginning of the XVIII century) created favorable conditions for the development of the economy of Azerbaijan in the XVII century. The Azerbaijani city of Shamakhi attracted merchants not only by the presence of a large amount of raw silk and silk products. The Shirvan raw silk was of high quality. A. Juvaini, Quatremère de Quincy and others report a large amount of raw silk and silk fabrics imported from Shirvan [4, pp. 52-55]. The traveler of the XV century I.Schildberg also wrote that the best silk is in Shirvan [18, p.52]. C. Forster also confirmed the great importance of silk production in Shirvan [24]. Shirvan silk was exported not only to the eastern countries and cities of the Russian state, even to Venice, where "excellent velvet" was produced from raw silk.

The cities of Azerbaijan, Arash and Shaky, were major centers of silk trade, and their economic importance was confirmed by many medieval travelers [25, pp.23-24]. Raw silk, produced in large quantities in Sheki since ancient times, has been the main export commodity. Based on the data of I.Schildberg, Professor I.Petrushevsky writes that during this period Shaki

was a prosperous city producing high-quality silk for export. Referring to E.Chelebi, he writes that after Shamakhi, Sheki and Arash, the city of Ganja was a major center of silk trade [18, p.100].

Many Western European authors mention a type of silk that is called "Seta Gangia" in foreign markets. Ganja silk was of high quality, and Volynsky wrote that "Ganja merchants sent 100 bundles of silk abroad per year" [2, p.84]. According to the data of 1653, the city of Ganja was still considered the center of trade and crafts, although in many respects it had lost its former importance [23, p.184].

E.Chelebi writes that the silk dresses of Tabriz became widely known, they actively participated in domestic and foreign trade [3, p. 254]. It can be said that the trade in fabrics, especially silk and raw silk, was the first among other handicrafts, since fabric production occupied the main place in the cities of Azerbaijan in the XVII century. From Shirvan, Karabakh and many other provinces of the country, raw silk was transported in large quantities to the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Poland, and through their territory to the countries of Western Europe.

Merchants from Azerbaijani cities brought raw silk to Russia, Russian merchants also came to Azerbaijan to buy and sell raw silk. A significant part of the raw silk exported to Moscow and Arkhangelsk was sold there to foreign merchants. In the middle of the XVII century, a pood of high-quality raw silk was sold in the markets of Shamakhi for 22-25 rubles, and in Moscow for 40 rubles [9, p. 137]. Raw silk, purchased in the cities of Azerbaijan for 15-16 rubles per pood in certain periods, brought great income to Russian and European merchants. Thus, in Yaroslavl, a pood of raw silk cost 50-60 rubles, in Arkhangelsk-70 rubles, and in Western European countries - more expensive [9, p.30]. According to the data for 1614, 1 safavid currency was equal to 6 rubles. According to the documents of 1624, 1 safavid currency was equal to 8 rubles [10, p. 20], and according to the data of 1666-1667, 1 safavid currency in Shamakhi was equal to 7 rubles [20, p.61]. At the end of the XVII-beginning of the XVIII century, the exchange rate changed in favor of the ruble. The data on the ratio of safavid currency and ruble cannot be considered accurate, as they are very different. In general, it is impossible to give accurate information about medieval Safavid monetary units, as well as about their units of measurement. The Safavid and European currencies were different depending on the location and period. This is often noted by European travelers.

Since the 70s of the XVII century, Russian-Azerbaijani relations have been developing more widely. Through Russia, trade with Western European countries is also activated. From a 1679 document it appears that the trade in raw silk was concentrated in the hands of certain merchants. An example is the appeal of Shamakhi merchant Mammad Yusif Gasimov and merchant Yeni Julfa Grigory liskov on behalf of their colleagues to the Russian ruler. This petition sought permission to transport 48,7,000 Poods of raw silk across Russia to Western Europe [2, p.96].

Moscow attached great importance to Azerbaijani cities in the raw silk trade. Therefore, during the XVI-

XVII centuries, Russia secretly, or even openly, fought against foreign (England, Holland, France) states that sought to take over Eastern trade. Tsarist and private merchants of Russia not only tried to conduct independent trade in the countries of the South Caucasus, but also "sought to become first-hand merchants in order to receive even more income [22, p. 31]. Russian merchants were very dissatisfied with the importation of European goods into eastern countries and eastern goods into Europe by the hands of foreign merchants. The Russians sought to concentrate Eastern trade in their hands, to become intermediaries between the East and Europe themselves. In the end, their struggle was crowned with success. Thus, the English "Moscow Company" in 1649 lost all its privileges and concessions and was forced to trade with Russia on a common basis [10, p.33]. It should be noted that in the 60-70s of the XVII century, inexpensive and high-quality cotton products of Azerbaijani, Iranian, and Central Asian origin successfully competed with Russian fabrics. Therefore, the Russian government prevented their import into Russia by creating a high customs barrier [17, p.120].

In the 80s and 90s of the XVII century, Indian merchants also intensified their activities on the Volga-Caspian route. At the same time, despite the weakening of the importance of transit routes through the Ottoman and Syrian territories, a significant part of Azerbaijani goods were sent to European countries by this route – through Istanbul-Izmir-Aleppo [7, p.76].

During the reign of Peter the Great, silk production was established in Russia and from 1714 to 1725, 14 manufactories were engaged in the production of silk. But the Russian silk industry was almost completely dependent on raw materials imported mainly from the Caspian countries [11, pp.31-56]. According to Peter I's plans, this valuable product, brought from Azerbaijani cities, was used as raw materials in new manufactories in Russia, and from there it was sent to European countries, mainly to England, the Netherlands, France and Poland [21, p.20]. The acceleration of the transportation of raw silk from Iran along the Volga-Caspian and Persian Gulf routes did not satisfy the Ottoman court. Transit through the territory of the Ottoman Empire has sharply decreased. The Sultan was worried about the active trade between Iran and the Christian country. The British merchant Bern, who was trading in Shamakhi at that time, writes that the sultan had not received gifts from the shah in the form of 40 bundles raw silks per year for a long time [15, p.29].

Representatives of the upper strata of Azerbaijan did not travel far, often selling their goods to more active Christian entrepreneurs. They used intermediaries in trading operations. Armenian merchants from different countries mostly acted as monopolists in trade operations. Suffice it to note that only in April 1792, Armenian merchants brought 2,600 pounds of Ganja raw silk to Astrakhan [13, p. 122].

The activity of Ottoman merchants in the export of raw silk from Iran and Azerbaijan can be particularly noted. There is information that Haji Mustafa from Bursa brought 42 bundles of raw silk from the territory of the Safavid state (1621). It is clear from the text of

the document that the trader had considerable experience in exporting raw silk from the Safavid state to Bursa. Some Ottoman merchants transported and sold raw silk from the Ottoman Empire to other countries. For example, it is reported that 40 bundles of raw silk brought from Bursa were delivered to Venice. There are also reports of the appearance of Azerbaijani and Iranian traders in the markets of Istanbul, Erzurum and Bursa during this period. Sometimes Safavids, including Azerbaijani merchants, stayed in cities of the Ottoman Empire for so long that local judges demanded that they pay taxes levied on their subjects [7, p.78, p.69-81]. The economic ties of the Ottoman merchants with the cities of Azerbaijan continued in the XVIII century. A Russian official document dated 1768 reports on the transportation of raw silk from Shamakhi to Turkiye (Baghdad and Basra). From there, raw silk was also shipped to England [14, p. 106].

The importance of the raw silk trade in the economic development of European countries, including the Russian state, is confirmed by many Russian and Western European researchers [19]. Chardin reports on the export of a large amount of silk from Iran and Azerbaijan [8, p.161]. In general and special research works, "Oriental trade" is characterized as the most profitable and profitable [9, p.32]. In the second half of the XVIII century, Russian merchants actively participated in the intense competition for the raw silk market and sales in the Caspian region. In order to have a monopoly position of the Russian trading capital, they sought to exchange their goods mainly for raw silk [1, p.83]. Colonel Stepan Burnashev, who acted as a representative of the Russian Empire during the reign of Kartli-Kakheti Tsar Irakli II, also reports on the role of such areas as Arash, Gabala, and Ganja in silk production. Burnashev wrote about the commercial importance of the city of Ganja in the 80s of the XVIII century. Highly appreciating the role of Ganja in foreign trade, the author wrote that large-scale trade with Iran and India is carried out through Ganja [5, pp.15-21]. According to Bronevsky, the silk produced in Talysh (Lankaran), although in small quantities, was not inferior in quality to Gilan silk [6].

Until the beginning of the XVIII century, Shamakhi silk was transported in large quantities to Europe by the British through Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Since the 40s of the XVIII century, Russian merchants have been strengthening in their place. Azerbaijani silk occupied an important place in trade operations between Azerbaijan and Russia. In the middle of the XVIII century, there were 50 silk enterprises in Moscow, which used an average of 3 thousand pounds of raw silk [27, p.121]. Shamakhi lagged behind the cities of Northern Iran in silk production. Shamakhi, which has long been the center of Shirvan economic and political life, has played an important role in its economic life throughout the entire period of Azerbaijan's history. In the second half of the XVIII century, Azerbaijan remained the main raw material base for Russian manufactories. In return, Russia exported industrial products and handicrafts to Azerbaijan.

In exchange for the export of raw silk, as well as silk fabrics, medieval merchants, who conducted a very

large trade, supplied Azerbaijani cities with cotton fabrics, furs of various types, spices, pearls, colored precious stones. Numismatic data also confirm the trade relations of Azerbaijani cities during the period under study. Evidence of this connection is Safavid, Ottoman, and Indian money discovered in the cities of Ganja, Irevan, Nakhichevan, Tabriz, and Shamakhi and dating back to the XVII-XVIII centuries. Raw silk products were considered suitable for long-term transportation due to their low weight and high demand.

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