The background of the book cover is a historical map with a warm, aged, sepia-toned color palette. A large, multi-masted sailing ship is depicted in the upper right quadrant, sailing across the map's lines. The map includes various geographical features, compass roses, and small icons representing different regions or cities. The entire cover is framed by a dark red border.

**International  
Trade**  
and the  
**Armenian  
Merchants**  
in the  
**Seventeenth  
Century**

*Vahan Baibourtian*

*International Trade and the  
Armenian Merchants  
in the Seventeenth Century*

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# International Trade and the Armenian Merchants in the Seventeenth Century

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Vahan Baibourtian



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## Preface

The venerable legend in the Holy Bible "and rested the arch on the mountain of Ararat", the ancient Armenian tales and myths, reliable information provided by historians, testimonies of clerics, cuneiform inscriptions of neighboring nations and rich written sources unequivocally attest that Armenia constituted one of the ancient cradles of human civilization. Being one of the most important cultural and economic centers since its early periods of history, Armenia has been actively participating in creating, enhancing, improving and disseminating both material and spiritual values. Having interacted with various nations on their path of historical development, Armenians have been involved in the shaping of ideas, the creation of spiritual-cultural values and the growth of civilizations.

The Armenian nation has never been a passive participant in historical development. Dynamism, diligence, creativity, a scientific spirit and desire for progress have always been the characteristics of this nation. Therefore, many consider the Armenian nation as the locomotive of the Middle Eastern and Caucasian civilizations.

The Armenians have left a lasting impact on the history of the world as active participants in international trade, as restless merchants crossing deserts and mountains, traveling to the most remote areas of the world. Regrettably, both Armenian and foreign researchers have not paid enough attention to this particular sphere of Armenian activity. This issue is of great interest, particularly if we take into account the fact that through all the historical epochs of human society, trade has always been one of the most important areas of activity.

The unique geographical position of Armenia, located as it is between the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas, on the crossroads between the East and the West has predetermined to a great degree not only the historical destiny of the Armenian nation, but also the character of its economic activity. Armenia's integration into the international trade since the beginning of the second millennium BC was primarily stipulated by this factor. There were moments in its

lengthy and rich history (for example, during the reign of Tigran II the Great in the first century BC), when all the main land routes of the world trade came under its control. Armenia was serving as a transit trade juncture for exporting the goods from the Eastern countries, namely Iran, India, China and Central Asia to the West.

Until the eleventh century, the Armenians were solely involved in overland trade. However, with the creation of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia or "Maritime Armenia" at the Eastern Mediterranean in 1080 the foundations for sea commerce of the Armenian merchants were laid.

Sixteenth-seventeenth centuries were the golden ages of the Armenian commercial capital. In this period Armenian merchants, in fact, did not have any competitors on transit caravan routes. Meanwhile, with their own ships Armenian merchant-khojas were involved in international maritime trade in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Mediterranean Sea.

In this work, we have tried to comprehensively study and disclose the roots and causes of the Armenians' talent in trade to which they owe earning the credit of a "commercial nation". In this regard, German philosopher Immanuel Kant's remark that the Armenians have "commercial spirit of particular nature" is worth mentioning. We have also tried to answer the question as to why Armenian trade capital in the late Medieval Ages was thriving not in Armenia proper, but in numerous Armenian Diaspora communities of Europe and Asia. Particularly, what were the reasons for Iran becoming the most important center of the Armenian commercial capital in the seventeenth century?

While writing the book, one of our major goals was exploration of the role of the Armenian merchant class in shaping the Armenian national liberation ideology. Through the overall analysis of the historical sources we have come to the firm conclusion that it was in the very circle of representatives of the Armenian trade capital or khojas, where the concept of Armenian national liberation thoughts were first born. And it is this class, being inspired by the desire for

freedom and liberation from foreign rule, that encouraged diplomatic contacts and negotiations with European Christian countries to that end.

In this work, I have tried to focus on the issues relating to the silk trade, which was the main component of international trade from the late Medieval Ages till the mid-eighteenth century, along with the trade of spices. The issue of trade routes linking the Eastern countries to Europe has been discussed in detail, along with a description of the Silk Route and the land transit routes operating through it, as well as the sea routes.

The seventeenth century began with a tragedy for the Armenian nation. The Iranian Shah, Abbas I, organized a forced migration of 330,000 Armenians, on a scale never seen till then from Eastern Armenia and some areas of Western Armenia to the internal regions of Safavid Iran. The military-strategic, political and especially economic motivations of this resettlement have been analyzed, bringing forward some new interpretations.

Iranian-European political and economic relations in the seventeenth century have been thoroughly analyzed. In particular, many noteworthy facts have been brought out on the fierce commercial competition between the European countries, which was often accompanied by trade wars, and the formation of new alliances and their collapse. It is also pointed out that the geographical discoveries at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries put an end to the commercial monopoly of the Levant. The Levantine trade came to a dead end, because from the continental routes, it shifted to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

The status of the Armenian merchants and their commercial and political orientations have been studied in the context of developments of global significance.

The geographical boundaries of the commercial network of Armenian merchants, encompassing Europe, Asia, Africa and in some cases even remote America, are presented in this work. The organizational forms of their trade are also discussed.

Political and social developments that occurred in the Asian countries at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries had a negative impact on the fate of the Armenian communities, which, in turn, caused the decline of Armenian trade. Thus, the once glorious pages of the history of the Armenian khoja mercantile community were closed.

I would like to point out that the issue of Armenians' involvement in world trade from the ancient times to the present-day is a problem, which still awaits study by scholars. Indeed, specific aspects of this issue, especially those concerning the period of ancient Armenia have been the subjects of serious studies and published in several monographs and articles, but a comprehensive study on the topic has not been done. This would have acquainted the reader with the path that the Armenians have traversed in such an important sphere of human activity as trade, especially the international trade exchange between different nations of the world.

It is not my intention to cover all the dimensions of the Armenian mercantile activities. It is a huge task to produce a comprehensive study of the topic, which still needs to be studied by researchers. In the main, I have aimed at exploring the role that primarily Iranian-Armenian merchants played in the international commodity exchange in the seventeenth century, being in the vanguard of the world commercial capital in the late medieval period. Moreover, I have addressed this issue in the light of the history of Armenia, Asia, Europe and world developments in general, which enables a deeper understanding of the problems raised.

At the end, I would like to express my profound gratitude to Ara Ghazarian from Boston University, the translator of the book from Armenian into English; to Martiros Iskenderian and Petik Daglian from Los Angeles for their sponsorship of this publication; to historian Dr. Vazken Ghougassian from New York for his valuable professional input; and, finally, to Sterling Publishers for making it happen.

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## The Growing Role of the Armenian Merchants in International Trade in the Late Middle Ages

Since the early history of humanity, a vibrant trade exchange between the East and the West was carried out through the Armenian plateau, which served as a link connecting the ancient Eastern civilizations to the less developed regions of the West. The ideal geographical location of Armenia constituted one of the factors promoting inter-tribal barter and trade. Another factor contributing to this was the sharing of borders with culturally and economically advanced countries.

By the beginning of the second millennium, Armenia, and its southern and southwestern regions in particular, were incorporated in the international trade.

During the Iranian Achaemenid period, the Armenians, through the "Royal Road," were in close contact with the sophisticated cultural world of Iran and the major trade centers of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequent to the declaration of independence by Greater Armenia, Artashat (Artaxata), its capital, became one of the major crossroads of international trade between Asia and Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Y. Manandian. *O torgovle i gorodakh Armenii v svyazi s torgovlei drevnikh vremen* [The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to the Ancient World Trade], (Erevan, 1954).

Approximately a century after its foundation, by the time of the Roman army Commander Lucullus' excursion to Armenia (69-68 BC) Artashat already had the reputation of a rich and wealthy city. For that reason, the renowned Plutarch called it the "Carthage of Armenia."

During the reign of Tigran (Tigranes) II (95-55 BC), Greater Armenia emerged as a powerful state in the Hellenic world. By 70 BC, Tigran the Great had an empire stretching from the Caspian to the Mediterranean. The world's major land trade routes were under its control and Armenia started to play a crucial role in the exchange of commodities between Asia and Europe.

In AD 66, Trdat (Tiridates) I was solemnly crowned in Rome as the King of Armenia. Thus, the foundations of the Arshakuni (Arsacid) dynasty were laid in Armenia. For half a century, the undisturbed peace between the two powerful neighbors, the Romans and the Parthians, contributed significantly to the positive growth of international trade. Trdat I initiated and applied tremendous efforts to rebuild Artashat, which had been destroyed by the Romans. This was an undertaking of great political and economic significance because the caravans arriving from the Far East continued to make stopovers at Artashat, and from there, continued their journey to the shores of the Black Sea or to the Mediterranean seaports, passing Mesopotamia.

In the trade between the East and the West, Armenia with its capital Artashat once again became a major center of transit trade since the main roads extending from Asia and the near Caspian shores had no alternative route but Armenia. That main road crossed through the entire territory of Armenia from East to West.

The kingdom of Greater Armenia which was drawn like a wedge between the Roman Empire in the West and the Parthians in the East, was to benefit greatly from the unprecedented invigoration of the international commerce, as was seen in the first two centuries of our era. This explains the economic and cultural flourishing observed in Greater Armenia, Lesser Armenia, and Pontus. One of the visible manifestations of this growth was the emergence of the new cities of

Nicopolis, Neo-Caesaria, Sebastia, Vagharshapat, Mtsurk, and others. The ancient cities of Armenia such as Artashat, Ervandashat, Zarehavan (in the province of Tsaghkot), Nakhijevan, Zarishat (in the province of Aghiovit), Tigranakert, Arshamashat, Van and Arzn also prospered increasingly.

Despite the fact that in AD 163, the Roman commander Statios Briskos plundered Artashat for the second time, Armenia continued to maintain its leading role in the trade between the East and the West.

After the fall of the Roman Empire and the creation of the Byzantine State, international trade relations not only did not decline, but flourished. In the economic life of the newly formed empire, Constantinople, lying on the shores of the Bosphorus, began to play a unique role. It was destined to play the role of a "golden bridge" between the East and the West.

Likewise, Armenia, lying on the great caravan trade routes, served as a transit crossroad for the export of goods from the East, i.e., China, Central Asia, and India, to the West. This role taken up by Armenia continued without significant interruptions for more than seven centuries, until the end of the sixth century.

In the sixth and seventh centuries, in the light of the fact that the "marzpanate" Armenia with its consistent struggles was able to maintain its internal stability, a new period of economic growth began to take root in the country. The firm incorporation of Armenia in the international trade was a manifestation of this fact. New urban centers were set up in Armenia by which trade gradually began to be concentrated in the hands of the Armenian merchants.

The remarkable economic and cultural growth in Armenia during the sixth and seventh centuries was replaced by an all-encompassing decline during the period of Arab invasions. Armenia lost its position in the international trade during the first stage of Arab rule. Specifically, the existing hostile relations and intermittent wars between the Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate hindered all commercial activities in Armenia.



However, beginning with the ninth century, economic and cultural ascent began anew in Armenia, due to the overall growth in the international trade. It has to be mentioned that in the Bagratuni (Bagratid) period, not only was international exchange of goods and commodities conducted via Armenia but also local production and export of such goods took place. This testifies to the fact that during the above mentioned period the agriculture based feudal economy of Armenia became an integral part of the international commodity circulation.

In the eleventh century, Central Asian nomadic tribes began to move toward the Near East. As a result, Armenia was subjected to indescribable plunder and devastation. Naturally, under these circumstances, Armenia could not play a leading role in international trade as it had under the Bagratids.<sup>2</sup> Unable to find space for their activities in their own homeland, a large segment of the Armenian merchants took refuge in other countries. In this period, the Crimea in particular attracted Armenians due to its advantageous trade opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

During the Seljuk invasions and subsequently, Armenian communities were created in the major trade centers of the Levant. They contributed significantly to the maintenance and continuation of Armenian merchants' contacts in the international arena. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries and later, Armenian merchant colonies were also established in numerous countries, near and far: Georgia, Central Asia, Chinese Turkestan, and China proper, in the city of Bulgar on the Volga, and Akhsara. From there, they conducted free trade with the vast territories under the rule of the Golden Horde, including the Black Sea cities, etc.

The merchant class of Armenia proper immediately established contact with the newly emerging or robust Armenian communities in various countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Y. Manandian, *O torgovle...*, p.18

<sup>3</sup> See V. Mikayelian, *Ghrami haykakan gaghut'i patmut'ivn* [History of the Armenian Community of the Crimea], (Erevan, 1964).

As is known, in 1080, in the northeastern shores of the Mediterranean between the mountain ranges of Taurus and Amanos, a new Armenian state, the Cilician Principality and later, the Kingdom or "Maritime Armenia" emerged. It lasted about three hundred years (1080-1375). Economically, Cilicia flourished as the main entrepôt for East-West trade, exporting spice, perfume and silk to Europe. It became the "doorway" to the countries in the East. The Cilician Kingdom concentrated on not only a significant portion of the land trade but also the maritime trade of the Near East. Thus, if in the earlier centuries Armenia took part only in the land caravan trade, now it was also incorporated in the maritime trade. The principal port was that of Ayas, mentioned by the Venetian traveler and merchant, Marco Polo. In fact, the Armenian Cilician State has had a distinct participation in the development of the international law of the seas. It has participated in the formation of the first international maritime codes, national legislation, and the development of the progressive norms of international agreements, which in turn have made a significant contribution to the establishment of the principle of unrestrained navigation.

Subsequent to the fall of the Armenian Kingdom in Cilicia, Armenian merchants mainly settled in the Crimea. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Armenian population in the Crimea was so large and economically so powerful that non-Armenians called the southeastern part of the peninsula "Maritime Armenia" (Armenia Maritima). In his encyclical, Pope Eugene IV (1431-47) of Rome also referred to it as Great Armenia.

Until the conquest of the Crimea by the Ottoman Turks in 1475, the Armenian merchants of the Crimea did not have any competitors in the land caravan trade between the Levant and the East. This monopoly was due to the fact that in the second half of the thirteenth century, all of Asia was under the domination of the Mongols, and in order to secure Asian merchandise, the European merchants had to depend on the assistance of the Crimean-Armenian merchants engaged in the caravan trade.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See V. Mikayelian, *Hay-italakan arnch'ut'wanner* [Armenian-Italian Connections], (Erevan, 1974).

William Rubruk, who, during his travels to the East had also visited Mongolia, observes that the Armenian merchants were frequently present in that country. Specifically, there were many Armenian merchants in Karakorum, the capital of Mongolia, and in the Mangu Khan's camp, where they enjoyed his support.<sup>5</sup>

The Armenian merchants in the Crimea were also involved in the export of goods from Russia's southern region and their transportation to the sea shore where they were turned over to the Venetian, Genoese, and Pisean ships. There, receiving the merchandise imported by the Italian ships, the Crimean-Armenian merchants transported the Western goods by their caravans to the interior of Asia.

They were also active in Poland, Hungary, Turkey, the Caucasus, Iran, the Baltic countries, England, France, Portugal and many other European and Asian countries. The Crimean-Armenian merchants appointed their own trade agents in the major trade centers.

After the fall of Kaffa in 1475, the Genoese lost their earlier dominance in the Black Sea trade. Thus, the Armenian merchants in the Crimea became the liaison point between Eastern Europe and the East. They brought the merchandise made in the Eastern countries by caravans to Lvov, where they found customers on the spot as well as among merchants from Krakow, Gdansk, and Nuremberg.

Between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the role of the Iranian cities in the international trade was growing. In particular, Tabriz turned into a major trade center. Its role as a trade pivot of international repute grew specially when Hulagu Khan (1217-65), the grandson of Genghis Khan, plundered Baghdad (1258), which appeared to be Tabriz's serious rival in the international trade.<sup>6</sup> Tabriz was rebuilt, and became a major trade and political center during the reign of Ghazan Khan (1295-1304). In fact, since that time, the trade route to India shifted from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Tabriz

<sup>5</sup> H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'iwinner*, vol. 1. *ZhG-ZhZ dar* [Travel Accounts, vol. I, 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Centuries], (Erevan, 1932), p. 7. Also see *Recueil des règlements généraux et particuliers concernant les manufactures, et fabriques du Royaume*, t. 1, (Paris, 1730).

<sup>6</sup> See Karl Jahn, *Tabris ein mittelalterliches kulturzentrum zwischen Ost und West*, (Wien-Köln, 1968).

(known in the Armenian literature as Davrezh, Gandzak Shahastan, etc) had a large Armenian population, among them a merchant class known as "dovlatavorner" and "khojaner." According to Marco Polo, the Armenians in Tabriz constituted a large segment of the population. In that trade-oriented city, the Armenian merchant class was directly or indirectly integrated in the international export and import of goods. This class brought European commodities by caravans from Constantinople, Trebizond, and Kaffa to Tabriz, and from there shipped them to the interior of Iran and to other Near and Middle Eastern countries. Besides that major trade route, there was another road which originated either in Cilicia or Syria and extended to Tabriz, mainly in two directions: one, from Cilicia via Urfa (or Edessa), Merdin, Bitlis, and Khoi to Tabriz, and the second, from Beirut via Aleppo also towards Tabriz.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Ayas-Tabriz trade route, along with the major path of the "Western Great Road", had become of a special significance for the international trade. The Florentine merchant Balducchi Pegolotti (early fourteenth century) provides a description of this trade route. It is assumed that a significant number of the merchants involved in trade utilizing that road were Armenians.

In northwestern Iran, besides Tabriz, the city of Sultaniyeh emerged as another trade center. It was built at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, during the time of Prince Arghuni (1284-1291) and his descendants. It is evident from the Italian sources that during the reign of the Hulaguids, the Genoese and Venetian merchants traded through Armenia with Tabriz and also Sultaniyeh, where they had their chambers of commerce and even consulates.

The international trade was invigorated during the first half of the fourteenth century in the southern regions of Armenia, specifically through the plain of Alashkert, Manazkert (Manzikert), and Archesh. However, as a result of the weakening and eventual collapse of the

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<sup>7</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'wnner*, p. 60.

Hulaguid dynasty, the southern regions of Armenia were deprived of their importance in the international trade. The devastating blow to the economic ascension of these regions was brought about by the destructive invasions of Timur-Leng (Tamerlane).

The cities of Ani and Kars, which were renowned in the past and played a remarkable role in the international economic relations, were no longer fulfilling a significant function in the fourteenth century. At that time, the most frequented trade route between the East and the West passed through Atropatakan (northwestern Iran) and the Caspian Sea. The Eastern silk and spices were taken to Astrakhan, then to the coastal cities of Azov and the Crimea, and from there transported by ships to Venice, Genoa and other Italian cities.

At every important junction of the international transit trade's main roadway, Armenian colonies were established, and Armenian trade houses carried out a pivotal function in the mercantile business along these lines.<sup>8</sup>

Since the mid-fourteenth century, as bloody wars were fought between the Golden Horde and the Il-Khanids, the trade route became unsafe. When in 1395 Tamerlane occupied and destroyed Astrakhan, a decisive blow was dealt to that major trade center and the commerce conducted through it.

These developments also obstructed the trade through Armenia. The volatile political situation, after the break-up of the Il-Khanids into numerous minor principalities and the resulting oppression and relentless atrocities among feudal cliques, as well as the insecurity of the trade routes, etc, almost brought the caravan mercantile operations through Armenia to a halt.

In the fifteenth century and later, several attempts were made by the countries in the East to revive the disrupted trade relations of the earlier times. However, these attempts only produced temporary results, because the relentless and incessant wars between various dynasties (Chobanids, Jalairids, Timurids, Kara-Koyunlu /"Black Rams"/,

<sup>8</sup> *ZhyE dari hayeren dzerageri hishatakaranner: masn erkord (1451-1480 t.t.) [15th Century Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, part III], compiled by L. Khachikyan, (Erevan. 1958), p. CV-CVII.*

and Ak-Koyunlu /"White Rams"/ Turkomans) made it impossible to guarantee the security of the roads which was indispensable for the international trade to flourish.

The Turkish victories of the fifteenth century in Asia Minor, the Balkans, and North Africa, and especially the seizure of Constantinople in 1453 and the fall of the Byzantine Empire proved calamitous for Europe's Eastern trade. The trade routes from the Adriatic Sea to the borders of Hungary, all the way to the Persian Gulf, came under the control of the Ottoman Sultans. And, after the conquest of the Trebizond Empire (1401) and the Crimea (1475) by Sultan Bayazid II, the Black Sea was turned into a Turkish "internal lake." All these events prevented the West from having contacts with the East.<sup>9</sup> The international trade route connecting Europe with the East was substantially disrupted. The Western merchants were deprived of the possibility of establishing lasting economic and trade contacts with the Middle East, India, and China through Asia Minor, Syria and Armenia, even while requiring raw material resources and stable export markets.

The economic policies of the Ottoman Sultans appeared to be extremely arbitrary. The "Janissaries adopted adverse positions regarding trade; and imprudent methods of looting by the Turks made the Italian merchants desperate."<sup>10</sup> The Venetians were obliged to either pay heavy taxes or leave forever the Middle East and their commercial bastions in the Aegean Sea. And, the Genoese were literally expelled from the Ottoman territory. Thus, Europe was cut off from the Eastern trade markets. The so-called great "Silk Route" which ran from China through Central Asia and Iran to the Mediterranean and Black Sea was also closed. That was the road through which Europe received silk products and raw silk. The establishment of Turkish rule in Egypt threatened the other road which was called the "Spice Route," and which stretched via the sea from India to Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Vsemirnaia istoriia* [The World History], (Moscow, 1957), tom 3, p.105. Also W. Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen-Age*, (Amsterdam, 1967), t. II., pp. 348-49.

<sup>10</sup> F. Ya. Polyanskii, *Economicheskaiia istoriia zarubezhnikh stran* (epokha feodalizma), [Economic History of the Foreign Countries (Feudal Epoch)], (Moscow, 1954), p. 360.

<sup>11</sup> Leo, Həyots Patmutiun, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, hat. 3, girk 1 [History of Armenia, Collection of Works], (Erevan, 1969), vol. 3, book I, p. 83.

Following the example of his predecessor, Bayazid II, Sultan Selim Yavuz ("the frightful") continued the conquest of the Arab lands and overran Syria, Palestine, and Arabia. Thus, the entire trade of the Middle East came under the tight control of the Ottoman Turks.

Of course, the trading countries of Europe made great efforts to restore and reopen the roads to the East. In 1571, when the joint fleets of Venice, Spain, and Genoa destroyed the Turkish military fleet in the Gulf of Lepanto, new hopes arose in the West regarding the impending liberation of Constantinople and consequently the reopening of the trade roads towards the East. However, those hopes were soon dashed. Turkey "regained consciousness", and as in the past, began blocking European access to India, the Far East and China.

However, the unnatural disruption of the ties between the East and the West could not be a permanent feature. The West, poised on an ascending path, felt the pressing need to maintain trade-economic relations with the East. The steady growth of the capitalist economy in the West made it imperative to secure sources for raw materials, and stable consumer markets.

Under these circumstances, the advent of intermediary merchants between the East and the West became important. The rising Armenian merchant *khoja* class assumed that significant role, and shortly reached such a position that at the end of the sixteenth century and through the entire seventeenth century, it had no competitors in the area of intercontinental trade of the Levant and the Middle and Far Eastern countries.<sup>12</sup>

Undoubtedly, this occurred mainly because the ruling Safavid dynasty in Iran, and, similarly, the Ottoman Turkey, became interested in the expansion of trade relations between the West and the East. With the realization of their military glory and the conquest of new territories, these states did not "shun" the trade which brought them a huge income. The Turkish historian Halil Inalcik writes in this regard

<sup>12</sup>V. A. Baibourtian, *Armianskaya koloniia Novoi Julfi v 17 veke* (Role Novoy Julfi v irano-evropeyskikh politicheskikh i ekonomicheskikh svyazyakh) [The Armenian Community of New Julfa in the 17th Century (The Role of New Julfa in the Irano-European Political and Economic Relations)], (Erevan, 1969).



that the Ottoman Sultans tried to procure their share not only from the trade of raw Iranian silk, but also from the exchange of goods which took place between Central and Middle Asia, India, and China.<sup>13</sup>

Under these circumstances, Europe had no choice but to resort to the help of intermediary merchants of Eastern descent, due to the fact that these merchants were under the Ottoman rule and their trade was profitable for the treasury of the Sultans. Thus, new opportunities to expand their trade opened up again for the Armenian merchants. Consequently, if in the Black Sea trade of previous centuries the Armenians had been partners of the Venetian and Genoese merchants, now they had the opportunity to work independently. Under the new conditions, their unexpected entry in the international markets surprised their contemporaries. Expressing those feelings, the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote: "Yet among other Christian nations, a unique spirit of trade prevails among Armenians. They are engaged in the exchange of goods, traveling on from the borders of China to the point of Cape Corso of the Guinea's coast. That testifies to the brilliant and hard-working nation's distinctive origin, a nation that cuts across the territories of almost the entire ancient world from northeast to the direction of southwest and manifests an ability to be welcomed by all nations amongst which it visited."<sup>14</sup>

There were many and diverse reasons for the unexpected emerging might of the Armenian merchant class. First, in both parts of Armenia, the earlier policy of physical extermination of the remnants of the Armenian fiefdoms continued. Their lands were taken over by the upper classes of the nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkish tribes. The Armenian secular feudal class as a political force had been pushed out of the historical scene and had to occupy itself with trade. In order to keep their lands and privileges, some members of the Armenian feudal class converted to Islam.

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<sup>13</sup> H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy*, "Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East" (London, 1970), pp. 210-11.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Sochineniya [Works]*, T. 6 (Moscow, 1966), pp. 572-73.



Thus, movable capital became the prevalent realm of the Armenian feudal class' activity. So naturally, given the oppressive environment of the East, trade "was the only sphere open to him [to the Armenian] that allowed certain opportunities to gain glory, enjoyment and power in this world."<sup>15</sup>

"Being deprived of their cities and villages, lands and palfreys, serfs and taxpayers, many of the Armenian feudal nobility emigrated, and were assimilated and ultimately vanished among the invading conquerors. Some of them pursued their personal security and comfort in commercial activities. Finally, there were some whose knightly sword and shield were replaced by the clerical mantle and censer".<sup>16</sup>

Chronicler Stepanos Dashtets'i of New Julfa makes the following observation on this issue, "Our nation cannot find neither calmness nor a safe haven for itself. Our country was taken over, and we fell under the yoke of invaders. We were deprived of the opportunity to serve in the army or be engaged in the government service. People were oppressed. All that existed was plunder and the advancement of arts was obstructed. In the given circumstances, those who could not find shelter and were not able to ensure their sustenance, chose the business of trade, and thus they were dispersed throughout every corner of the world."<sup>17</sup>

During the Mongol invasions and later during the political upheavals in the entire Middle East, Armenian medieval cities were either destroyed or devastated as a result of the political turmoil and reached the edge of extreme poverty. "The Armenian land, having been totally wasted under the breath of the Asiatic barbarism, could not provide any opportunity for more or less free and peaceful development of any political, civilian and urban life ..."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu . . .*, vol. 3, book I, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner hay azatagrakan mtk'i patmut'ean*, [Episodes from the History of the Armenian Liberation Ideology], vol. II, (Erevan, 1959), p. 455.

<sup>17</sup> M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzeragir No. 781 [Matenadaran named after M. Mashtots, manuscript No. 781], pp. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu . . .*, vol. 3, book I, pp. 12-13.

Under these circumstances, when the possibilities for conducting any trade and economic activity, as well as for cultural advancement became extremely restricted and almost unattainable in their motherland, the Armenian communities and colonies outside Armenia gained more significance, especially those that were established and prospered after the sixteenth century as Armenian trade settlements.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the Armenian "khoja" class, engaged in international trade, emerged on the historical stage in the sixteenth century. And this occurred following a period when its activity was temporarily halted due to the political turmoil in the Middle East, and the insecurity of the trade routes and other factors. During this time, the Armenian merchants started to reestablish themselves as mediators in the international trade between the East and the West.

The term "khoja" is a Persian word. It means "master," "prince," "landlord" or simply "wealthy." "Khoja literally means wealth and abundance not only in terms of money and treasure, but also in terms of the services rendered, virtue, and thinking. Therefore, Iranians customarily refer to all their writers, and prominent individuals with the title of khoja," writes a seventeenth century author.<sup>20</sup> The contemporaries honored their khojas with titles such as "prominent", "illustrious", "honorable", "famous", "majestic", "interlocutor" etc.<sup>21</sup> The word khoja, having the same meaning, has reached Turkey through Eastern Armenia, where Armenian merchants have been called khoja as well.

In Eastern Armenia, especially in the regions of Nakhijevan and Ghapan, numerous villages and towns emerged as trade centers. Famous among them were the Armenian towns on the left bank of the Araxes River, including Julfa, Astapat, Vanand, Bist, Agulis, Shorot, Nakhijevan, Shahkert, Ordubad, Agarak, Tsgghna, Dasht, Meghri, Ernjak, Dastak, Kaler, Jahuk, Khoshkashen, etc.<sup>22</sup> Also trade was well developed in Siunik (Ghapan), Artsakh and the cities of the Ararat

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Petrus Bedik, *Cehil Sutan* (Vienna, 1678)

<sup>21</sup>V. Mikayelian, *Ghrimi haykakan* . . . .

<sup>22</sup>S. V. Ter-Avetisyan, *Gorod Djuga* [Town of Jughha], (Tiflis, 1937), p. 27.

valley, including Erevan and others. In general, fascination with trade engulfed all the regions of the Julfa'-Dasht (Agulis) - Meghri-Sisian line.<sup>23</sup>

The above mentioned places quickly became important international transit stations for trade. In particular, Julfa became the most important "tourniquet" connecting Eastern markets with the West. "We do not know what has been its past in the ancient times," writes Leo. "But from the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries it begins to shine in the Armenian horizon as the homeland of fascinating merchants. They not only add interesting pages to the history of the international trade, but also constitute a major unparalleled socio-cultural element whose role in the development of the Armenian life is immense."<sup>24</sup>

Julfa is located on dry, rugged, almost inaccessible, terrain. It did not have local agricultural resources. An English traveler in the seventeenth century reports that with the exception of wine, Julfaites, had to import all their nutritional needs.<sup>25</sup> Its population never surpassed 10,000-12,000. It had about 2000 households and seven churches. Due to Julfa's wealth and significance, it has often referred to as the "pride of the Armenian nation" in Armenian sources. The eminent chronicler Arakel Davrizhets'i has described its immense wealth: Julfa " . . . at one time was great and prominent in the Eastern world,"<sup>26</sup> signs of which can be seen even today.

The Kara-Koyunlu Turkoman rulers had granted to Agulis, Julfa, and a number of other Armenian populated places, the "khas" status, which freed them from the control of the local feudal lords, and made them directly accountable to the "padishah" (supreme ruler). By this policy, the Turkoman conquerors attempted to make the Armenian ruling elements such as "meliks" (princes), merchants and

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\* The historic name of Julfa on the banks of the Araxes River has been Jugha. In the literature it has been referred to as "Old Jugha," which should not be confused with Jugha of Isfahan, which is known as "New Jugha," or "New Julfa."

<sup>23</sup>Leo, *Erkeri Zhoghovatsu . . .*, vol. 3, book 1, pp. 234-35.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes*. (Glasgow, 1906), MCMV, VIII, pp.496-497.

<sup>26</sup>Arakel Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'wn [History]*, (Vagharshapat, 1896), p. 12.

the clergy a bulwark of their power.<sup>27</sup> In a decree relating to Julfa's taxes and duties, issued by the Kara-Koyunlu Jihanshah, there is not even a reference to taxes collected in return for trading activities.<sup>28</sup>

"Julfa," writes Leo, "is a small isolated, unrivaled autonomous merchant community under the rule of its *khojas*. The unique significance of Julfa was due to its geographic position, located on the great road, which connected Central Asia, and Iran, to the Black Sea's eastern basin, and the main roads of the Caucasus. Lying on the left bank of the Araxes River, Julfa provided facilities on the international routes coming from the North to continue towards the great marketplace of Tabriz, and beyond to other directions. Thus, Julfa was a great station on that road, a major depot of commercial merchandise."<sup>29</sup>

However, it was not only this communication facility which made Julfa a significant trading center. An amazing business trait was observed among the Julfa residents that in fact constituted an extraordinary and unique phenomenon in the Armenian reality and is referred to as "*jughayetsiutun*" (Julfaism). "A Julfite not only had the talent to trade, but also he had the skills of creating the favorable conditions for it. To obtain the right of proper peaceful normal activities under the unrestrained barbaric Asiatic circus was a magnificent achievement, even greater than pacing by caravans from the Himalayas to Europe. The Julfite achieved this accomplishment not through the power of arms, but through mind, wit, and relying on its greatest power, money."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the Armenians of Julfa gained a reputation for skill at their trade, and for honesty and diligence in pursuing it. The "*jughayetsiutun*" (Julfaism) was such a universal phenomenon that often

<sup>27</sup>A. Hovhannisyán, *Drvagner* . . . , p. 429.

<sup>28</sup>Herbert Busse, *Untersuchungen zum Islamischen Kanzleiwesen* (Cairo, 1959), urk. I, p. 237.

<sup>29</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapitale ew nra kaghakakan-hasarakakan dere hayeri mej*, h. 1 [The Merchant Capital and its Socio-political Role among the Armenians], (Erevan, 1934), p. 57.

<sup>30</sup>Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu* . . . , vol. 3, book I, p. 236.

Armenian merchants of other neighboring provinces such as Agulis, Sisian, Nakhijevan, and others were also included under its rubric.

Julfa was considered a really distinctive international trade center. It had become an irreplaceable link connecting the markets in the East and the West. Holding this status it became even more prominent after the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks and the severance of the trade-economic ties between the East and the West.

The Ak-Koyunlu and Kara-Koyunlu rulers of Iran expressed great motivation and interest in the expansion of Asian trade to Europe through their domains, which brought substantial revenues to their treasury.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, they actively encouraged the Armenian merchants of Iran, Transcaucasus and even Turkey in their transit trade among the countries of the East and the West. Under this sponsorship policy of the Turkoman rulers, in a short period, Eastern Armenian merchants, headed by the Julfaites, gained a decisive role in the foreign trade of Iran and Transcaucasus. However, Ottoman Turkey had continuously been conducting a hostile policy towards its neighbors to the East. In an attempt to strike a devastating blow to, and take over, the vast Iranian territories and, thus, control the vital revenue producing trade routes, it made every effort to disrupt Iran's foreign trade with Europe, which naturally would affect the latter too. Not being able to stop the advance of the Ottomans towards Europe, the European rulers began an active search for an ally in their efforts to form an anti-Turkish alliance. They presumed that in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire, Iran would become their natural ally.

The Republic of Venice, whose trade interests had suffered significantly due to the policies of Turkey, dispatched ambassadors, one after another to Tabriz, the capital of Ak-Koyunlu court of Uzun Hasan (1453-1477). Thus, in their capacity as Venetian ambassadors, Caterino Zeno (1471-1474), Giuseppe Barbàro (1471-1478) and Ambrosio Contarini (1473-1477) conducted negotiations in Iran.

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<sup>31</sup>John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Minneapolis, 1976), p. 43.

The Iranian-Armenian merchants involved in the international trade and whose interests had also suffered due to the strict control and restrictions imposed by the Ottomans, were voluntarily incorporated in the course of political negotiations between the ruling Ak-Koyunlu of Iran and the Republic of Venice.<sup>32</sup> Since Armenia was under the yoke of Ottoman Turkey, the representatives of the Armenian trade capital naturally could not remain indifferent, and just take an observer's seat. Among the Armenian clergy were individuals "who allied themselves with the Turkoman tribal leaders in the hope to raise the status and authority of the Armenian Church. Some individuals were even exploiting the idea of an alliance having in mind the aspiration to realize in prospective the Armenian political self-determination."<sup>33</sup>

In 1489, Uzun Hasan dispatched a delegation to Italy in which one of the senior members was the opulent Armenian-Iranian merchant Khoja Mirak.<sup>34</sup> Uzun Hasan entrusted him with a letter addressed to the Doge of Venice (chief magistrate of the Republic of Venice). In this letter, after listing all his victories, he expressed the hope that with the combined force of his troops and the Venetian navy, it would be possible to drive the Turks out of the region.

Khoja Mirak's delegation arrived in Venice in February 1470. Appearing before the Republic's government, the members of the delegation suggested the signing of an alliance, an honorable treaty against the Sultan of Turkey and Egypt, emphasizing on the necessity of a Venetian naval attack on them.<sup>35</sup>

In his reply, the Doge of Venice thanked Uzun Hasan for sending a 40,000 strong army under the leadership of his son to Karaman (in the region of Iconia and Cilicia). However, he expressed his reservations, arguing that the size of the army was not large enough to guarantee a victory.

<sup>32</sup> See Vahan Baibourtsian, "Iranahayeri masnaks'tut'iwne irana-ewropakan hakat'urk'akan dashink' steghtselu p'ordzerum (16-17-d.d.)" [The Participation of Iranian Armenians in Attempts to Establish Anti Turkish Alliance (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)], *Laber hasarakakan gitut'iwneri*, No. 9 (Erevan, 1984)

<sup>33</sup>A. Hovhannisyan, *Drwagner* . . . , pp. 434-35.

<sup>34</sup>Ghevond Alishan, *Hay-Venet [Armenian-Venetian]*, (Venice, 1896), p. 187.

<sup>35</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'iwner* . . . , p. 156.



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Khoja Mirak and his entourage then departed for Rome and met the Pope and the King of Naples, offering them a similar treaty. After these negotiations, it was announced that an anti-Ottoman League had been formed with the participation of the Roman Pope, Hungary, the State of Ak-Koyunlu, Karaman (European sources refer to it as Karamania) and Cyprus (the Lusignan State).<sup>36</sup> However, this alliance turned out to be a stillborn child and remained only on paper.

Although during various stages the governments of Venice and Ak-Koyunlu cooperated militarily against the Turks, which resulted in a series of victories (in Cilicia, Asia Minor, etc), in general they were unable to sign a lasting military treaty.

In August 1473, Uzun Hasan sustained a devastating defeat by the Turks in the battle of Derjan. That defeat substantially weakened his rule, which went into decline.

Uncontrolled elements were unleashed. Naturally, the first victims of such a situation were the wealthy infidel elements. On March, 24, 1486, Khoja Mirak fell victim to the insatiable greed of the local rulers in Tabriz, who killed the eighty year-old man.

Such atrocities directed against the merchant class of a disintegrating state, especially the Christian Armenian merchants, deprived them of all opportunities for any fruitful activity.

Yet by the early fifteenth century, the influence of the Safavid feudal clan began to significantly grow in northeastern Atrpatakan (Azerbaijan). Already in the second half of the same century, the Qezelbash, headed by the Safavids, expanded their struggle against the Ak-Koyunlu and Kara-Koyunlu Turkoman dynasties, striving to establish their rule in Iran. That struggle received vigorous assistance from the representatives of the minor and middle feudal classes, unhappy with the rule of the nomadic Turkoman nobility. The process was also supported by the merchants, among them the Armenian merchant class and the clergy associated with them who were interested in ending the inter-feudal conflicts, stabilizing the central government, and guaranteeing the security of the caravan routes.

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<sup>36</sup>G. Berchet. *In Republica di Venezia e la Persia* (Torino, 1865), p.28



Exploiting the existing divisions among his adversaries, Ismail, the son of Safavid Sheikh Haydar, first crushed one of the fierce enemies of the Safavids, Farukh Yasar, and later, in 1501-1502, the forces of Sultan Alvendi of Ak-Koyunlu. In 1502, Ismail declared himself Shah (King) of Iran laying the foundations of a new dynasty, known as the Sefian or Safavid (1502-1736). In 1503, he destroyed the forces of Sultan Murad Ak-Koyunlu and conquered Central and Western Iran. Thereafter moving towards the East, in 1510, Shah Ismail crushed the armies of the leader of Uzbek tribes, Mohammad Sheyban Khan, and occupied the Khorasan (Khurasan) and all the territories extending up to the Amu Darya River.

From the earliest days of his reign, the new ruler of Iran, Shah Ismail (1502-1524), showed benevolence towards the Armenian merchant class. Armenian sources attributed this to the fact that before his accession to power, the Ak-Koyunlu padishahs and the Shirvanshah rulers had tried hard to hunt him down and destroy him, considering him a dangerous adversary. During that most difficult period of his life, the Armenian merchants had come to his aid and had hidden him among the Armenian monks of Aghtamar. Later, ferociously pursuing his political adversaries and their Sunni faith, the indebted Shiite ruler supported the Armenian merchants in every way possible, and granted privileges to them as well as to the Armenian clergy.

This story has a historical basis, but does not constitute a thorough explanation of the friendly behavior manifested by the young King towards the Armenian merchants. A circumspect and far-sighted politician, Shah Ismail appropriately rewarded the Armenian merchants and the clerical class for their role in the newly established state's economic and political long-term plans.

The Safavid State was quickly becoming the main competitor of Turkey in its struggle to gain economic and political superiority in the Middle East and Transcaucasus. First, its conquests kept growing. In 1507, the Safavids occupied Armenia, and in 1508, Baghdad and Arabian Iraq. Along with the pursuit of military glory, the Shah also tried to corner his competitor in the sphere of trade. He not only



entered the stage as a skilled merchant, but actively encouraged trade in his state. Shah Ismail I had the objective to take under his control the strategic junctions of the Near and Middle East as well as all the trade routes connecting the Levantine ports to India and Central Asia.

The Turkish historian, Halil Inalcik, writes, "All the routes by which the Iranian silk was exported to Europe had gone to the Turks. Dissatisfied with just having control on the trade routes, the Turks in the sixteenth century made attempts to occupy and annex to their territories the silk producing regions of northern Iran, such as Shirvan and Gilan."<sup>37</sup>

The same author expands on the idea that Turkey not only tried to grab a share in the trade of the Iranian raw silk, but also the trade of Central Asia, India, and China.<sup>38</sup>

However, these endeavors of Ottoman Turkey met with fierce resistance by the Safavids, who considered the absolute control of the silk-producing regions of Iran an issue of life and death. The Safavid Sheikhs had the monopoly over Gilan silk. From that silk-producing region, they gradually stretched their control to the Shirvan silk, after numerous battles with the Shamakhi-seated Shirvanshahs. Thus, by 1488, the ruling Qezelbash chieftain, Sheikh Safi of Ardabil, attacked Shamakhi, putting to the sword the people of the town.<sup>39</sup> The Safavids also took over Georgia in 1519, another silk-growing region, after which they subdued the Khanate of Shirvan.

In 1538-1539, Shirvan once again revolted against Shah Tahmaz. This time, the movement was led by Shahrokh, the son of the late Faroukh Yasar. The revolt was drowned in blood by the brother of Shah Tahmaz, Alkhas Mirza. The entire elite of Shirvan's noble class,

<sup>37</sup>Kh. Inalcik, *Mezhdunarodnii torgovii puti i Osmanskaya imperiya* (Doklad na 5-om mezhdunarodnom kongresse ekonomicheskoi istorii v Leningrade) [International Trade Routes and the Ottoman Empire (Paper submitted at the 5<sup>th</sup> international congress of economic history)], (Moscow, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>Kh. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Economic . . .*, pp. 210-11.

<sup>39</sup>B. Sargisean, *Mayr ts'uts'ak hayeren dzeragrats' Matenadarani Mkhit'areants' i Venetik*, hat. II [The Original List of the Armenian Manuscripts of the Mekhitarist' Matenadaran in Venice], (Venice, 1924), p. 1160.

comprising about 600 people, was ruthlessly exterminated. In lieu of his services, Alkhaz Mirza received Shirvan as a personal estate.<sup>40</sup> During the course of his battles against his opposition, Shah Tahmaz subjugated other silk-producing regions such as Shaki, Gandzak (Ganja), and Artsakh (Karabagh). Cognizant of the significance of trade in a state's economic, political, and military strength, Shah Tahmaz made an effort to facilitate the expansion of domestic trade. By his orders, wells were dug in the caravan trade stations; caravansaries were constructed; and a ruthless campaign was conducted against bandit gangs, and rebellious tribal chiefs, etc.

Deacon Zacharia provides interesting information in this regard. Shah Tahmaz "properly organized and put to order the political affairs, devised and set principles for all professions, and standardized weights and measures and established shops and hotels to facilitate the expansion of trade. Those who did not obey were punished by death".<sup>41</sup> In 1504, the Shah ordered the removal of all road taxes (*damgha*).

If the resolution of the silk issue within the country was relatively easy, it required major efforts abroad. In order to overcome that obstacle, from the very beginning, the Safavids had to engage in strife against the centralized and powerful Ottoman State which, with an iron fist and watchful eye, monitored the caravan trade routes leading to the West. In the meantime, the Ottoman government recklessly manifested expansionist tendencies towards the East with an intention to take full control of silk, the "soft gold" of the time.

Dominating the scene were the Turkish-Iranian wars which began in 1514 and continued with intervals for close to one and quarter centuries.

The belligerents attempted to conquer Arabian Iraq, Armenia, Atrpatakan, Transcaucasus and Daghestan, establish their rule on the trade routes crossing Armenia and Iran, and take over the major centers of silk production in northern Iran, Transcaucasus, etc.

During those wars, naturally, the trade was hindered and an extremely insecure atmosphere was created for the Armenian

<sup>40</sup> Chèref-Oudkline, *Chèref-Nameh* (S. Petersbourg, 1873), t.II, partie I, p. 572.

<sup>41</sup> Zakarea Sarkavagi Patmagrut'iwn [Historiography], (Vagharshapat, 1870), p.10-15.

merchants—their lives as well as property. Thus, an Armenian manuscript colophon reads that during the reign of the Shah Khoodabandeh (1578-1587), when the Ottoman Turks invaded Transcaucasus, the people of Julfa suffered the most: they had to abandon their city and escape to Agulis. "At this time, in 1584, this Holy Gospel was restored. It was in the hands of the infidels. I, Khoja Grum of Julfa bought it back ... during the reign of Shah Khoodabandeh, the pontificate of Catholicos Grigor of Etchmiadzin, and the Lordship of Mala Petros of Julfa. Those were bitter times. Julfa had taken asylum to Agulis, and I, Khoja Grum bought this Holy Gospel and donated it to Saint Astvatsatsin (church)."<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the "khoja" class, from the earliest days of its formation and development had to endeavor under extremely difficult conditions. From the early sixteenth century, in both parts of Armenia (Eastern and Western), a disastrous situation was prevailing. The cradle of the Armenian nation had turned into a theater of military operations between the most powerful state of the Middle East, Ottoman Turkey, and its challenger, Safavid Iran, that sought to acquire the leading political status in the region.

In the entire territory of Armenia, the expansion and conquests of the nomadic tribes took place at the cost of the massacre of the native people. As a result of the kidnappings, deportations and all sorts of oppressive measures, the Armenian population was forced out of its ancestral lands.

In order to escape the chaotic situation of the time, and the relentless oppression, and heavy tax collections, the Armenians merchants left their homeland and departed in three directions. Heading to the Northwest, they moved to Italy, Venice and Livorno (Tuscany region) in particular, as well as to Holland. Eastward, they moved to Iran, India, and up to the Far East. Towards the South, they chose Aleppo, and partly resided in Smyrna (currently Izmir).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup>S. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Djuga*, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup>Artawazd arqepiskopos Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'wn Halepi hayots' h. 3* [History of Aleppo Armenians], vol. III, (Paris, 1950), p. 285.

Thus, involvement in trade became a means of survival as well as accumulation of wealth for the Armenian people. On the other hand, the Armenian population was diminishing and the process of de-Armenization of the whole country was taking place.

Because of the political and economic fragmentation in both parts of Armenia, there existed no power and authority that could lead the people and become the pillar for national independence. As far as the National Church was concerned, which as a rule acquires natural leadership of a nation deprived of its own statehood, in the sixteenth century it was not in a position to withstand the conquerors in the name of the nation. That was the case especially at the time when the administrative unity of the National Church had been disrupted. The Armenian merchant class, whose interests had already suffered due to the military operations taking place in Armenia, began to express discontent against the foreign yoke. As the merchants grew more affluent and gained financial power, the manifestations of their feelings became more explicit and apparent. The Armenian *khojas* were gradually beginning to express an interest in the political life of their people. In particular, they were concerned with their status of being deprived of civil rights.<sup>44</sup>

The Turco-Iranian wars invigorated the European powers that had begun to nurture new hopes that the time had come to pressure and encircle the Ottomans from the East and the West. The issue of signing an anti-Turkish Irano-European treaty again became an essential item of the agenda. It is known, for instance, that the Republic of Venice, through the Armenian merchants operating in Europe, had been gathering information about the newly founded state in Iran. Thus, when Murad of Angora (*Ankiurats'i*) arrived in Venice from Tabriz in 1503, the Republic's senate tried to gather information regarding the Safavid State and its military campaigns against the Ottomans.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Vahan Baibourtsian, *Hayastani azatagrman khndire ew jughahay arewtrakan burzhuazian 16-17 clarerum* (*Hodvatsneri zhoghovatsu*) [The Issue of Liberation of Armenia and the Julfa Armenian Merchant Bourgeoisie in 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries (Collection of articles)], (Erevan, 1989), p. 98.

<sup>45</sup>Alishan, *Hay-Venet*, p. 204-05.

For Venice, it was an issue of vital importance, because after the fall of Constantinople, the Republic of Venice had periodically fought against the Ottoman Turks. "Like other major European centers in the mid-fifteenth century, Venice, having lost its dominant position in the international trade, through these wars made fruitless efforts to re-establish its lost weight in the Middle East and to mitigate the fateful decline of the trade over the Mediterranean."<sup>46</sup>

In its turn, the Safavid government understood well that it was difficult to struggle alone against a formidable enemy such as the Ottoman Empire. Hence, it sought allies among the European powers. Shah Ismail initiated negotiations with Venice, attempting in earnest to reach an anti-Turkish agreement.<sup>47</sup>

In pursuance of their national interests, the Armenian merchants were purposefully engaged in those negotiations. In the sixteenth century, the idea of the liberation of Armenia with the help of the Western Christian states was revived. In 1547, Catholicos Stepanos of Salmast convened a special consultative meeting, which decided to send a delegation to the West, to conduct negotiations regarding the amelioration of the situation in Armenia. The Armenian clerics made an attempt to attribute to themselves the initiative for the meeting, whereas in reality, it was credited to the representatives of the Armenian trade capital. "Thus, due to the efforts of the representatives of the Armenian trade capital and especially its eastern major branch, the *khoja's* capital, the realization of a diplomatic mission was made possible..." writes Leo.<sup>48</sup>

In 1562, Catholicos Mikayel of Sebastia decided to send a new delegation headed by Abgar of Tokhat, to the West. It is obvious that Abgar and his colleagues had close ties not only with the Armenian Church hierarchy, but also with the elite of the Armenian *khojas*.<sup>49</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the political expectations of the Armenian merchants from the Western powers were not accidental;

<sup>46</sup>A. Hovhannisyan, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 56-57.

<sup>47</sup>Raphaël du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660* (Paris, 1890), p. 276.

<sup>48</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital* , p. 116.

<sup>49</sup>A. Hovhannisyan, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 59.

they were mainly due to the fact the Armenian trade-lending capital was in close cooperation with the European capital.

Thus, it can be concluded that the idea of Armenian liberation was conceived among the merchant bourgeoisie, the circle of khojas. It was this very class that got gradually imbued with the idea of liberating the Armenian plateau, and began to support every initiative for that purpose.<sup>50</sup>

During the course of their negotiations with the European states, the Safavids often appealed to the Armenian merchants. "Feeling the need for the assistance of a number of European powers in their struggle against Turkey, the Safavids were pleased to use the services of the Christian diplomatic agents: the Armenian merchants and clergy."<sup>51</sup>

It is known, for example, that in 1506, the delegates of Etchmiadzin were tried and beheaded in Constantinople after being accused of spying for the Safavids. Furthermore, Ghevond Alishan presents numerous pieces of evidence, which prove fact that the merchants of Old Julfa carried out the Shah's diplomatic assignments.<sup>52</sup>

In its turn, the Republic of Venice often used the services of the Armenian merchants during the course of diplomatic relations with the Safavids. Thus, we learn from the documents in the archives of the Republic of Venice that during negotiations with Shah Tahmasp I in 1571-1572, Ambassador Vincenzo d'Alessadri used the assistance of the Armenian merchants of Julfa.<sup>53</sup> The most prominent among these merchants, Mirijan and Maruta, informed the Venetian ambassador that two of their representatives had departed for Venice on a secret mission under the guise of commerce. They were specifically mandated to inform the Venetian government that the Persian King was preparing for war against the Ottomans. And that

<sup>50</sup>V. Baibourtian, *Hayastani azatagrut'ean . . .*, p. 99.

<sup>51</sup>I. P. Petrushevskii, *Ocherki po istorii feodalnikh otnoshenii v Azerbaidjane i Armenii v 16-nachale 19 v.v.* [Sketches of the History of Feudal Relations in Azerbaijan and Armenia in the 16<sup>th</sup> - Beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> Century], (Leningrad, 1949), p. 182.

<sup>52</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Hay-Venet*, p. 372.

<sup>53</sup>G. Berchet, *La Republica di Venezia . . .*, pp. 31, 33-34.

people in Turkey were praying in the mosques for lasting peace between the Turks and the Iranians, so that their naval fleet would not subject to new troubles by the Christians.<sup>54</sup>

The negotiations of the Armenian merchants proved fruitless, and there was no signing of an Irano-European political alliance. However, in the course of the negotiations, the Armenian traders became familiar with the market conditions of Europe; i.e., their needs for Eastern goods. They learned about the European business practices, cooperated with the European trade companies and money-lending institutions, and finally established contacts with the European government circles that were indispensable for the expansion of their commercial activities. By the mid-sixteenth century, the parameters of the operations of the Armenian merchants of Julfa extended from the Far East – India, China, Southeast Asia, Central and Middle Asia – to the Levant and European countries. The merchants also controlled the export of raw silk to trade centers of the Levant.

Arthur Edwards, an employee of the so-called English "Muscovite" Company testifies that in the sixteenth century, Julfa alone exported annually 400-500 mule-loads of silk to Aleppo and in return imported 800-1000 mule-loads of English and Venetian broad cloth.<sup>55</sup> Another employee of the same company, Lawrence Chapman, testifies that Armenians brought the Safavid silk to the Syrian cities of Aleppo and Tripoli. He mentions that the merchants of Julfa often brought up to 1000 mule-loads of silk to those cities. We find similar testimony in the writings of the seventeenth century English traveler, John Cartwright. In particular, he notes that the Julfaites from Shirvan alone imported annually 500 and sometimes even 1000 camel-loads of raw silk to Aleppo.<sup>56</sup> The representative of the prominent Italian family, the Medici, and other Florentine houses in Bursa (a city in the Northwest of Turkey) mentioned in 1501 that every year large caravans

<sup>54</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, (Venice, 1893), p. 386.

<sup>55</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, vol. II (London, 1913), vol. III (Glasgow, 1903-1905), p. 45.

<sup>56</sup>John Cartwright, *Voyage from Aleppo in Hispahan and Back Again*. "Hakluytus posthumus of Purchase his Pilgrims," vol. 8 (Glasgow, 1905), p. 501.

headed towards Bursa from Iran, loaded with silk. From his reports, it becomes apparent that the merchants waited impatiently for the arrival of these caravans whose imported merchandise was quickly purchased. The merchants received generous compensation, since every fardellon (equal to 150 kg) of silk in Italy generated 70-80 ducats of pure profit.

The merchants of Julfa emerged on the scene with such a level of organization that the English competitors had to confess that "complete disruption of trade between the Venetian and the Armenian companies was impossible." In a letter from Qazvin, addressed to the English trade center in London, Lawrence Chapman has mentioned that such disruption was possible, but only if "you could find means to receive annually 100 bales from Armenians and in return pay them one-third of its value in currency, and the remaining with silk fabric."<sup>57</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century, the two powerful states of the Near East, Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran, continued their wars in an attempt to resolve a number of military, political, economic, territorial, and ideological issues. During the period 1532-1534, and in 1548 and 1553, the Turkish armies repeatedly invaded the Safavid territory. After the death of Shah Tahmasp I (1524-1576), taking advantage of the internal turmoil in Iran and having ended its war against the German Empire of the Habsburgs in January 1577, Turkey resumed its attacks against Iran in 1578. The war spurred deep-rooted divisions among the Qezelbash nobility. Shah Ismail II, who for twenty years was imprisoned by his father Shah Tahmasp in the fortress of Kahkahe, ascended to the throne in 1576.

His reign was short. He was poisoned in 1578. His brother, the ailing and feeble Mohammed, who was given the name of Khoodabandeh (God's servant), succeeded Ismail on the Safavid throne. He reigned till 1587.

An extremely dire situation was created in the internal life of Iran. Because of the reckless tax policy, the feudal economy of the country faced a severe crisis. Intermittent inter-feudal quarrels, rebellions by the peasantry and the class of craftsmen, revolts of the

<sup>57</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'iwnner*, p. 411.



nobility on the peripheries of the country and military actions by nomadic tribes became characteristic of Iran. This crisis had a negative impact, especially on the country's domestic and foreign trade. The most important trade routes leading to Aleppo in the West, and to the Persian Gulf port of Hormuz in the South, were abandoned. The state treasury was completely empty. The government was faced not only with an economic crisis, but was also on the verge of collapse.

In 1587, under the pressure of two powerful Turkic-speaking tribes of Rumlu and Ustajlu, Shah Sultan Mohammed Khoodabandeh yielded his throne to his eighteen-year-old son, Shah Abbas I (1587-1629), who is known in the history of Iran as "Shah Abbas the Great."

On March 21, 1590, in Constantinople, the Safavid Kingdom was forced to sign a peace treaty with Ottoman Turkey by which Eastern Georgia, Eastern Armenia, all of Atrpatakan with the exception of Ardebil and Talish as well as a portion of Lorestan was ceded to Turkey.<sup>58</sup> The young monarch utilized the peace and calm to rebuild and revitalize the country's military and administrative system and to expel the Uzbeks, who had made serious intrusions towards the eastern borders of the Safavid State. He undertook two major incursions towards Khorasan, in 1594 and 1597, respectively. The Uzbeks, suffering a major defeat in a battle near Herat, were forced to leave Khorasan. Three years later, the Qezelbash army took over Merv (Marv) and in 1602, Balkh as well.

Simultaneously, the Shah undertook the suppression of domestic revolts and inter-feudal quarrels, and commenced the centralization of the country's government and the strengthening of its economy. With an iron will and ruthless ferocity, he subdued the disobedient feudal lords in the country's periphery who were in constant contact with his enemies, the Ottoman Turks, Uzbek Khans, Portuguese and, to a lesser degree, with Russia.

In order to curb the centrifugal tendencies of the feudal lords, the land holdings of the state (*divan*) and the royal household (*khasse*)

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<sup>58</sup>Iskandar bek Torkman (Munshi), *Tarikh-i Alam Arayi Abbasi, be sayz va ehtemami mirza Mahmud Khonsari*, (Tehran, 1313/1934), p. 231.

were increased at the expense of their property. The Shah intended to limit the influence of the militant Qezelbash nobility and other Turkic tribes, and in turn strengthen the civil bureaucracy and the Shiite clergy by attracting the Persian elements in the state apparatus.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Shah Abbas formed a fifteen-thousand strong cavalry made up of gholams or royal slaves. Among them were a large number of Armenians and Georgians, who, from early childhood, had been enslaved through "devshirme" (a system of collection, recruitment and mandatory conversion into Islam of Christian children). These soldiers were called "ghul," meaning servant, slave; and their commander was called "ghullar-aghasi." During the reign of Shah Abbas, a famous military commander of Armenian descent, Allahverdi Khan, held the position of "ghullar-aghasi". Among the gholams of Armenian descent were Gharchkha Khan, Shirvan's beglerbeg Yusuf Khan and others.<sup>60</sup>

Shah Abbas also created an infantry brigade of 12, 000 musketeers (tufangchi), conscripted like the Turkish janissaries. Besides that, with the help of the famous English adventurer Sir Anthony Sherley, cannons were molded, which laid the foundations of the Persian artillery. The accomplishments of Abbas I in military reforms reduced the significance of the feudal lords, and weakened the political role of the military aristocracy of the nomadic Qezelbash and other Turkic tribes. Thus, the Qezelbash military-nomadic aristocracy, which had until then played a leading role, was reduced to a secondary level.

Through the efforts of the Shah, the Persian civil bureaucracy, which was closely affiliated with the upper class of great merchants, started to play a leading role in the affairs of the state, and, thus, with his reliance on the state's Iranian elements, Shah Abbas I laid the foundations for the so-called "Iranization" policy.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup>I. P. Petrushevski, *Ocherki po istorii.*, p. 81.

<sup>60</sup>V. Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-muluk, A Manual of Safavid Administration* (London, 1943), p. 17.

<sup>61</sup>H. F. Farmayan, *The Beginnings of Modernization in Iran. The Policies and Reforms of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629)* (Salt Lake City, 1969), p. 14.

The Shah also aimed to create a dependable base among the minorities of Iran, including the Armenians.<sup>62</sup> That is why the scribe Hovhannes Abegha (1609) calls the Shah a "friend of the Armenian nation."<sup>63</sup>

In 1598, Shah Abbas moved the Safavid capital from Qazvin to Isfahan, a city in the interior of the country, largely populated by ethnic Persians. With this move, he intended not only to strengthen the central provinces economically and politically, but also pursue long-term military-strategic and economic objectives. He turned Isfahan into the center of the country's political and trade activity. From then on, all the caravans that moved from North to South and from East to West had to pass through this centrally located city.

Isfahan was also one of the main centers of the ancient Iranian civilization. It was especially close to such cities as Yazd, Kashan, and Shiraz, all of which had a predominantly ethnic Persian population. In the new Safavid capital, the Iranian element was to play a leading role.

Undoubtedly, the above mentioned reforms of Shah Abbas were providing relatively favorable conditions for the steady development of the economy, especially trade and handicrafts. Realizing that the power of a state is anchored in the wealth of the country, the "merchant king"<sup>64</sup> began to pay greater attention to the development of trade. He promoted the construction of roads and caravan-houses, and tried to create the necessary conditions for safe caravan traffic. All these efforts culminated in an increase of money and merchandise circulation and expansion of local and foreign trade.

While strengthening his state, the Shah was preparing for a new war against Ottoman Turkey. He was closely monitoring the developments in the internal affairs and foreign policy of the rival country. At that time, Turkey was undergoing a process of deep internal political crisis, having stepped into a state of decline since the late

<sup>62</sup>H. F. Farmayan, *The Beginnings of Modernization in Iran . . .*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup>*ZhyE dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner*, hat. A [15th Century Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts], vol. I, No. 321.

<sup>64</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital*, p. 61.

sixteenth century.<sup>65</sup> The might of the Ottoman Empire had been shaken by the military defeats suffered in Europe, the inter-feudal quarrels, and the insurrections by the Jalalis that in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries spread all over Anatolia, threatening to expand to other regions as well. In such a situation of anarchy, only two provinces recognized the authority of the Sublime Porte.<sup>66</sup>

The possibility of an impending war with Turkey made Shah Abbas search for allies. In the last decade of the sixteenth century he began to dispatch delegations to Europe, first to those countries, which were immediately threatened by Turkey and its vassal Khanate of the Crimea. He also initiated talks with countries whose interests had suffered due to the domination of the Turks on the trade routes connecting the East and the West.<sup>67</sup> Shah Abbas began using the services of Armenian intermediaries during the Irano-European negotiations more often. The Ottoman rule in the Transcaucasus had affected the international trade; consequently, the Armenian merchants' free movement over the trade routes crossing Turkey had been restricted. The dissatisfaction of the Armenian khojas also grew because under the rule of the Shah, the cities recognized as "khas," such as Julfa, Agulis, Meghri, Shorot, Astapat, and others, were deprived by Turkey of the privileges and special rights that they had enjoyed previously. Naturally, under these conditions, the Armenian traders placed great hopes in, and contributed to the efforts for, an anti-Turkish treaty. Thus, in 1597, Hakob Margarian Amdets'i, under the guise of a legate of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, but in reality as a diplomatic envoy of the Shah, was dispatched to Europe. The scope of his credentials is not known. However, the sources refer to the top secrecy of his mission. On June 22 and 23, 1597, during his

<sup>65</sup>V. A. Gordlevskii, "Vnutrennee sostoyanie Turtsii vo vtoroi polovine 16 v.," *Trudi Instituta Vostokovedeniya AN SSSR* sb. 2 [The Internal Situation in Turkey in the Second Half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Works of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 2<sup>nd</sup> issue], (1940), p. 6.

<sup>66</sup>Hekmat [Mohammad Ali], *Essai sur l'histoire des relations politiques Irano-Ottomanes de 1722-1747* (Paris, 1937), p. 34.

<sup>67</sup>Nasrolah Falsafi, *Zendegani Shah Abbas Avval*, jeld 1-4 (Tehran, 1952-1972).

interrogation by the authorities of the Republic of Venice, he informed them that Shah Abbas had sent him to Europe. He also informed them that after his departure from Iran, he had visited the Georgian princes Alexander and Simon, who gave him letters addressed to the Pope of Rome and to "the ambassador of the Roman Emperor," and that he possessed "some papers" from the Georgian patriarch as well. Skipping the issue of the "papers" contents, Hakob Amdets'i said that his task was to submit these to their addressees and await their responses. Incidentally, he did not conceal the fact that "on other occasions, I have taken letters from these people, as well as from Cardinal Santa Severina to the Shah, the Georgian princes and patriarch."<sup>68</sup> Hakob Amdets'i, also stated that the persons who entrusted him with the letters implored the Pope "to pray so that they can move ahead against the enemy. Also, they are waiting for a victory by the Westerners, which will make them also assured."<sup>69</sup>

On July 9, 1599, Shah Abbas dispatched to Europe a delegation headed by Hussein Ali-Beg Bayat and accompanied by Anthony Sherley. The mission was a complete failure.<sup>70</sup> That experience left a lasting impression on the Shah, and forced him, thereafter, during the negotiations with Europe to increasingly use the services of the Armenian merchants and clergy. Between 1593-1606, during the period of the Turco-Austrian war, Iran and the European powers were involved in active negotiations. In 1600-1604, Shah Abbas sent a number of delegations to Europe.<sup>71</sup> The delegation sent to Venice in 1603 included three merchants from Julfa.<sup>72</sup>

However, convinced that the delegations dispatched to Europe could not be productive at this time, the Shah vigorously began new preparations for war against the Ottoman Empire. He tried to attract the feudal lords from the areas of potential war zones. In this regard, Arakel Davrizhets'i writes: "Many princes and lords, both Muslim and

<sup>68</sup>Gh. Allshan, *Hay-Venet*, p. 353-54.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>70</sup>Kazem Sadr, *Tarikh-i siyasati kharejii Iran* (Tehran, 1943), p. 58.

<sup>71</sup>Antonio de Gouvea, *Histoire orientale des grandes progrès de l'Eglise catholique* (Bruxelles, 1609), p. 10-11.

<sup>72</sup>G. Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia*, pp. 44, 47, 192.

Christian, from the region of Atrpatakan had gone to the Persian king, because they were bitterly oppressed by the Ottomans. They were burdened by heavy taxes, their property was looted, and they were persecuted for their religious beliefs. Not only Armenians, but Georgians and Muslims as well endured many hardships. This was the very reason that they went to the Shah of Iran looking for protection so that perhaps with his help they could be freed from the cruelty and yoke of the Ottomans."<sup>73</sup>

Arakel Davrizhets'i continues: "The reason for their taking refuge with the Shah was the fact that they knew for sure that the Shah was ready for a campaign to the land of Armenia . . . The reason for the people of Dizak and Dasht to go to the Shah was heavy taxes, plundering, looting, oppression, and the merciless killing of the Christians."<sup>74</sup>

Shah Abbas I, who was preparing for the great war against Turkey, received them with open arms. He bestowed upon them high honors, and a variety of rights and privileges.

Wealthy Armenian merchants constituted a large number of those who migrated to Iran. They manifested strong discontent against the Turkish authorities.

The Shah granted compassionate privileges to Catholicos Davit and Melikset of Etchmiadzin, Bishop Manuel of Havuts Tar, Bishop Astvatsatur of Geghard, and to other high-ranking clergy of the Armenian Church who were also among the refugees. In 1603, they fled their Sees "due to their daily hardships", and took refuge with the Shah. The latter gathered information from the refugees "on the Ottoman government, and the condition of the people residing in Armenia, and numerous details regarding the border area." The Shah "considered the timing to be favorable to commence his invasion of Ottoman Turkey, taking into account the chaotic conditions in Armenia and the disgusting situation of its people".<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup>A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'wn*, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15 yev het.

<sup>75</sup>Harut'wn Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu* [History of New Julfa], (New Julfa, 1880), vol. I, pp. 10-11.

Taking advantage of Turkey's dire domestic political situation, Shah Abbas I violated the 1590 Turco-Iranian peace treaty and on September 14, 1603, began military operations against Ottoman Turkey.

The Persian armies entered Atrpatakan, and on September 28 took over Tabriz. Then, they conquered Nakhijevan, and surrounded Erevan, where the Turkish army was fortified. In the meantime, the Shah sent armies for the conquest of other places and cities under the Turkish rule. Arakel Davrizhets'i reports that Gandzak, Artske, Archesh, Van, Manazkert, Alashkert, Karin, Kaghzvan, Basen, Khnus and their surrounding provinces were invaded.<sup>76</sup>

After the conquest of Erevan by the Persians (in June 1604), Turkey, which had been able at that time to put an end to its domestic discords, sent an army under the command of Jghal-Oghli Sinan Pasha to face the armies of Shah Abbas. In the fall of 1604, the Turkish armies entered the plain of Mush and began to advance towards Erevan. Seeing the strength of the enemy, Shah Abbas decided to retreat to Tabriz. At the same time, he decided to turn the conquered territories into a "dead zone" or "scorched land" by deporting the Armenian population to the interior of Iran. Earlier examples of such a plan were seen during the reigns of Uzun Hasan of Ak-Koyunlu and Shah Tahmasp of the Safavids.

At the outset, army units were sent to Kars and the nearby regions "to plunder and destroy all the residential settlements in the path of the armies of the Rum (the Turks), to eradicate any trace of animal feed and grain in the fields, and transfer the infidel (Armenian) subjects to this side (Iran)". The troops were ordered to plunder properties, and loot and exterminate those who did not wish to migrate, remaining loyal to the Rum.<sup>77</sup>

The Safavid forces were ordered to deport the Muslim as well as Christian population. However, the majority of the deportees were Armenians. Arakel Davrizhets'i testifies, "Not only from one or two regions, but from many places, they were deported to Iran. Starting

<sup>76</sup>A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'wn*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>77</sup>Iskandar Bek, *Tarikhi Alam Arayi* . . . , fn41, p.463.

from the border of Nakhijevan up to Eghegnadzor, to the shores of lake Gegham, as well as Lori, and the region of Hamzachimian, Aparan, Sharabkhaneh, Shirak all the way to Zarishat, and part of the villages of Kars region and Kaghzvan, the entire plain of Alashkert, villages of Maku, regions of Aghbak, Salmast, Khoy, and Urmia. Also the expatriates who had remained in the city of Tabriz, and its villages, in the entire Ararat valley, city of Erevan, region of Ghrpulahgh, the valleys of Tsaghkonk' and Garni' gorges, Urtsadzor. And before these the entire population of the regions of Karin, Basen, Khnus, Manazkert, Artske, Archesh, Berkri, and Van were taken captive and brought to Erevan, from where they were all deported.<sup>78</sup>

To get an idea of the population driven out of Armenia, it is enough to say that the number of Armenians taken captive from Artske, excluding those killed, was 23,000. According to Arakel Davrizhets'i, the number of Armenians deported from Western and Eastern Armenia reached 300,000.<sup>79</sup> A large number were drowned in the waters of the Araxes or died en route due to deprivations.

Davrizhetsi does not specify to which cities of Iran the refugees were deported. He only mentions that "they all were migrated to the land of Pars (Iran)."

Based on the sources at his disposal, H. Ter Hovhaneants presumes that some of them were settled in Kashan, Qazvin, Gilan, Anzali, and so forth. As evidence, he cites the encyclical issued by Bishop Movses on January 12, 1762, addressed to the Armenian population of the places mentioned above. The encyclical is addressed as "Apostolic grace and letter of protection to our people of Armenian communities in Kashan, Qazvin, Gilan, Anzali, Darband, and in large and small villages in their vicinity."<sup>80</sup>

The demographic distribution of Armenian immigrants was not limited to the above places. The majority of the refugees were dispersed in the central regions of Iran, which constituted the core of the Shah's

<sup>78</sup>A. Davrizets'i, *Patmut'wn*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53

<sup>80</sup>Harut'wn Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, vol. II, p. 30.



grand idea. Thus, by organizing the forced migration of the Armenians or the so-called "Great Surgun", Shah Abbas I pursued military-strategic as well as economic goals.

The military-strategic objective was very clear: to turn into desert all those territories through which the Turkish army was to advance. He presumed that this would not only hinder the advance of the enemy forces, but would also significantly guarantee the security of the border regions of Iran in the future. The political objective was clear as well: to weaken the regions of the country populated by non-Iranian ethnic groups. More inclusive and comprehensive were the economic objectives. First, the Shah strove to strengthen and develop the less populated central regions of Iran at the expense of new human resources, and then to boost the trade-economic life of the country.

Undertaking this massive exodus, Shah Abbas knew well that the settling of a significant number of merchants and craftsmen in Iran would have a positive impact on the advancement of foreign trade and would contribute to the country's economic development, in the central provinces in particular.<sup>81</sup>

And, finally, with the help of the Armenian merchant class, the Iranian monarch strove to boost the country's economy, which was encountering a crisis, and especially to revive Iran's stagnant foreign trade with the Asian and European countries. It was his dream to move the international center of trade from Julfa to Iran, and reroute the silk caravan roads through the capital city of Isfahan towards the Persian Gulf. With the realization of that plan, Shah Abbas I also intended to hurt the rival, Ottoman Turkey, by depriving the latter of the huge tax revenue generated from the export of Iranian raw silk. The aspiration to reach that objective urged the Shah to turn into desert all those territories which lay on the Erzerum-Tabriz trade route, because the greater part of the profit generated from the operation of this active trade route poured into the Ottoman treasury.

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<sup>81</sup>I.P. Petrushevski, *Ocherki po istorii . . .*, p. 82.

In order to turn Iran to an international center of the silk trade, the Shah resorted to extreme measures. Thus, during the deportations from the Transcaucasus, he settled 40,000 Armenian peasants, 12,000 Georgians and 7,000 Jews in "Heavenly Mazandaran", one of the silk-producing regions of Iran, which was his personal fief.<sup>82</sup> Instead, that region turned into a cemetery for them due to the humid weather and unhealthy climate. Besides, by the order of the Shah, following the example of the Turks, all the mulberry trees in Kakhet were destroyed, to put an end to the Georgian silk industry. With that act, the Shah intended not only to direct an economic blow to Turkey, but also make political gains, since the silk trade that constituted the backbone of Georgia's foreign trade, was strengthening Georgia's ties with the Muscovite State.

The same policy of Shah Abbas manifested itself in an outstanding way by his destruction of Old Julfa and the resettlement of its population in Isfahan.

It must be mentioned that from the earliest years of his reign, Shah Abbas I had taken the Julfa merchants under his patronage. The 1592 royal decree given to Khoja Nazar ordered "all the servants of his State" not to hinder or interfere with Nazar's trade activities.<sup>83</sup>

It is presumed that as in the case of Agulis and the Armenian villages of the region of Yernjak such as Krna, Aparaner, etc, Julfa was also privileged and declared a "khas" estate. By this act, the Shah extended to these territories his personal trusteeship and took them under his auspices. The taxes and fees of such estates were to be paid to the Shah directly. The tax collectors were not allowed to enter these estates. They were exempt from the organized periodic boys' conscription for the king's court. These estates had gained their privileges through the mediation of papal nuncios with the Shah.<sup>84</sup>

In 1590, according to the Turco-Iranian Treaty, Julfa was turned over to Ottoman Turkey. The Shah was deprived from using Julfa's

<sup>82</sup>*A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, vol. I (London 1939), pp. 99-108.

<sup>83</sup>Harut'iwn Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'iwn Nor Jughayu*, vol. I, p. 158-59.

<sup>84</sup> S.V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Djuga*, p.30.

trade capital in favor of his country's foreign trade. That was a significant blow also to his treasury. In the meantime, the khojas of Julfa involved in the international trade over the Turkish territory brought in huge revenues to the treasury of the Sultans.

All these factors convinced the Shah that during his retreat to Iran from the Transcaucasus it would be a big mistake to leave Julfa in the hands of the enemy. Furthermore, his interests required him to ravage and devastate the city, and to deport the Armenian khojas to Iran. Thus, the fate of Julfa was predetermined. In 1605, Shah Abbas ordered his army commander Tahmas Quli Beg to relocate the population of Julfa to Isfahan and raze Julfa to the ground.<sup>85</sup>

The Safavid King moved 10,000 Armenian households to the central regions of his country. Among them, besides the Julfaites, were the natives of Erevan, Agulis, Dasht, Tabriz, Nakhijevan, etc.<sup>86</sup> In order to make them settle down in Iran, the Shah granted them certain rights and privileges.

The scribe Khachatur of Khizan testifying in that regard writes: "I thank God that our enslaved Armenian nation freely worships the Christ, and has erected churches everywhere, and has magnificently decorated them. The church beadle rings the bells louder than the Turkish mullah. The dead are buried in procession with crucifix and chasuble. At epiphany they freely bless the water, singing the hymns loudly, like in the times of St. Gregory the Illuminator and King Tiridates."<sup>87</sup>

The Shah had adopted a particularly sympathetic policy towards the Julfaites. In a special decree dated 1605, he allocated lands from the royal "khasse" estates in the southern part of Isfahan, on the right banks of the Zayenderud River, for the construction of a settlement named New Julfa. Indeed, this new town very soon became the largest and strongest center for the Armenian trade, keeping that status for almost a century.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup>A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmur'iw'n*, p. 57.

<sup>86</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzeragir No. 2381, f. r. 252b-253b.

<sup>87</sup>ZhE *dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaranner*, bat. A, No. 321.

<sup>88</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital*, p. 66.

During the establishment of the New Julfa, its entire population, with some exceptions, was of Julfa origin, later other Armenian immigrants who were involved in trade also settled there. It became a trade settlement. Fifty-one years after the construction of New Julfa, during the reign of Shah Abbas II, two new neighborhoods were constructed, named "Erevan," and "Tabriz," inhabited by prominent merchants who had originally migrated from those cities.<sup>89</sup>

As was mentioned, before from the earliest days of its establishment New Julfa enjoyed a number of rights and privileges. The khoja class, in particular, which constituted the elite of the Iranian merchant class, obtained a number of economic, political, and legal liberties, including the right to retain and develop its ethnic and religious characteristics, a phenomenon which was unique and unprecedented for a Muslim country.<sup>90</sup>

The Shah granted the Armenians of New Julfa all the privileges associated with the "khas" rights. They were recognized as "Tajeire-e khass-e sherif," that is, merchants empowered with the prerogative to sell royal goods, which gave them the status of privileged royal merchants.<sup>91</sup> Shah Abbas gave the Armenian khojas of New Julfa the same status which their contemporaries, the Armenian "chelebis", enjoyed in Turkey.

In addition, the merchants of Julfa also enjoyed social privileges. "On the tombstones of some of the prominent members of Julfa community reads 'free'. That is to remind the future generations that the deceased used to enjoy rights of a free citizen in Isfahan but not of an imprisoned one. This privilege was granted mainly to people of Julfa."<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants', *Pamut'iwn Nor Jughayu*, p. 277-81.

<sup>90</sup>R. W. Ferrier, "The Armenians and the East India Company in Persia in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century," *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series, vol. 26 (1973), p. 40.

<sup>91</sup>*Dnevnik osadi Ispagani afgantsami, vedennii Petrosom di Sargis Gilyanents v 1722 i 1723* g.g., [A Diary of the Afghan Siege of Isfahan composed by Petros di Sargis Gilanents in 1722 and 1723], (S. Petersburg, 1870), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>92</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants, *Pamut'iwn Nor Jughayu*, vol. I, pp. 45-46.

The decree of Shah Abbas I dated Jamadi al-ula 1014 (of the Muslim calendar) (1605) reads that the Armenians in the Safavid State are recognized not only as free citizens but also as guests, which gave them additional privileges. That meant that they were not to be perceived as foreigners.

The Shah also issued a number of special decrees (firmans), which protected the Armenians of Julfa from persecution by local authorities. These decrees proclaimed that the population of New Julfa were to be treated as he, the Shah, treated them, meaning with benevolence.<sup>93</sup>

New Julfa was also granted the right to self-government, including the right to elect from among themselves, with no interference by the Iranian authorities, the *kalantar* (mayor of the city). The French traveler, de Chinon, who in the mid-seventeenth century visited New Julfa, testifies that "the Shah had trusted the administration of that small republic to the Armenian Khoja Safar, and later to his brother Khoja Nazar, who is the father of the present governor."<sup>94</sup>

Armenians in New Julfa were given the right for local resolution of their legal disputes by the so-called chief judge, who was usually elected from among the influential merchants of the community.<sup>95</sup>

When legal disputes arose between the Armenians and the Persians, by the order of Shah Abbas, the judicial authorities issued verdicts in favor of the Armenians.<sup>96</sup> Often the Shah drove out the local Muslims from the vicinity of Isfahan and gave their lands to the wealthy and upper class Armenian *khojas*.

To protect the Armenian merchants and their property from marauding mobs, Shah Abbas issued a decree stating that anyone killing an Armenian would be sentenced to death. In other words, Armenians were taken under government protection.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46-47.

<sup>94</sup>John Carswell, *New Julfa: Armenian Churches and other Buildings*, (Oxford, 1968), p. 78.

<sup>95</sup>Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia*, (New York, 1929), p. 121.

<sup>96</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants, *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, p. 46-47.

<sup>97</sup>Bastani Parizi, *Siasati va eqtesad dar asri safari*, p. 121.

One of the aspects of the economic policies of Shah Abbas I was the mitigation of the population's tax burden. Subsequent to his victory in the war against the Uzbeks, in 1598, the Shah significantly reduced the taxes for the population of Persian Iraq, the central province of Iran. Similar relief was also extended to the people of New Julfa, with their annual poll tax (kharaj) being lowered. According to the testimony of the French traveler Jean Baptiste Tavernier, the Shah granted the wealthy and prominent merchants of Julfa certain rights to which only noblemen and high-ranking officials were entitled.<sup>98</sup> In the Armenian sources, for example, it is observed that the New Julfa kalantars (mayors), Khoja Nazar and Khoja Sarfraz were considered the advisors of the Shah<sup>99</sup>, and Khoja Sarfraz was even honored with the title of "the king of Armenians." The following words have been inscribed on his tombstone:

O, my unequaled khoja, who was the king of the Armenians  
You were named Sarfraz, straightforward and powerful judge  
You were wise, and every king was amazed by your splendid discourse  
Many princes were anxious to meet you, O you wonderful and glorious prince.

According to another source, an influential merchant named Khoja Marjan occupied the position of general manager of the Safavid government finances.<sup>100</sup>

In the testimonies of contemporaries, we find numerous facts that reveal the proximity of famous and influential khojas of New Julfa to the Shah and his court. This was not unique to the period of Shah Abbas I alone, but was also the case in the reigns of his successors. Thus, in a letter written from Isfahan to Rome on September 18, 1629, Friar Timas, a Carmelite, states that the new King, Shah Sefi I

<sup>98</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six Voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes* (Paris, 1692), p.p. 616, 627.

<sup>99</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants, *Patmut'iwn Nor Jughayu*, p. 48.

<sup>100</sup>H. K'iwrdean, *Jughayets'i khoja Nazar ew ir gerclastane*, arandznatip [Khoja Nazar from Julfa and his clan] special edition, p. 23.

(1629-1642) occupying the Safavid throne "expressed friendly sentiments and behavior towards all Christians. On many occasions, he had visited the houses of Khoja Nazar and other prominent members of [New] Julfa community and dined with them. It is true that they have given certain apportionment of funds as well as other gifts to the Shah which they continue to this day."<sup>101</sup>

The Englishman Thomas Herbert testifies that on April 10, 1628 when he arrived in the vicinity of Isfahan with the English delegation, among the greeters, in addition to the Vizier and the Sultan of Isfahan, Meloim Beg, was the "Armenian prince," Khoja Nazar. An entourage of 4,000 cavalry and countless infantry accompanied him. A few days later, on April 15, Khoja Nazar received the English ambassador at his house. In meticulous detail, Herbert describes that extravagant reception, also indicating that the cups and mugs of Khoja Nazar's house were all made of pure gold.<sup>102</sup>

Adam Olearius, another European who visited Isfahan in September of 1637 as a member of the German delegation mentions "the Armenian governor Sarfraz Beg with his two brothers, Elias Beg and Vatan, who were part of the royal entourage receiving their delegation." He also reports that in the honor of Ambassador Bruckmann and the German delegation, Sarfraz Beg hosted in his house a lavish banquet, worthy of royal dignitaries. In his turn, on October 1, 1637, the German ambassador gave a reception which, among others, included the ambassador of Moscow, "the governor of the Armenians" Sarfraz Beg and his two brothers, the heads of the British and French merchant groups, and missionaries of the Augustinian and Carmelite orders.<sup>103</sup>

Shah Abbas himself visited the houses of the New Julfa Armenians, participating in their festive celebrations, and even inviting them to join him in the royal feasts.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup>A *Chronicle of the Carmelites* . . . , vol. 1, p. 308.

<sup>102</sup>Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia* (New York, 1929), p.121-23.

<sup>103</sup>*Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors* (London, 1662), pp.275-78, 281-82.

<sup>104</sup>A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 65.

A royal decree by Shah Abbas II, dated 1642, and presently exhibited in the museum of the All Savior's Monastery of New Julfa, declares Khoja Sarfraz worthy of high royal grace, and reveals that on the occasion of his coronation, the Shah honored Sarfraz with a *khelat* (robe of honor). He also suggested to Khoja Sarfraz to give twelve *tumans* to the official who would present him the royal gift.<sup>105</sup>

In those days, that was a significant sum. The custom of presenting of "gifts" on behalf of the Shah to his subjects was a way of extorting money from the country's people of prominence and wealth.

Nevertheless, why did Abbas I grant such broad rights and privileges to the merchants of Julfa who were not only the representatives of an oppressed and deprived people, but also part of the non-Muslim minority among his subjects? Undoubtedly, the main driving force for him in this case was the state interest of Iran. "Even the formidable tyrants did not forget that the welfare of a country is not vested only in victorious wars, but rather in blossoming economy and trade. Indispensable for the growth of trade were the factors of peaceful life, secure communications, and other facilitating and creating profitable conditions."<sup>106</sup> According to Chardin, Shah Abbas I realized that trade was the only way to prosperity and welfare for the country.

In the early seventeenth century, the European trade circles had little interest in Iran and the European merchants were hardly involved in the foreign trade of the Safavid Kingdom. However, Iran was greatly interested in establishing trade relations with the European countries. Therefore, the Iranian rulers had pinned great hopes on the Armenian merchants engaged in international trade. That was why the Armenian *khojas* not only enjoyed the patronage of the Safavid kings, but also were to some extent recognized as the representatives of the ruling elite. The commercial interests of Iran obliged the Shah to be tolerant in religious matters with the Armenians. The French traveler, Pitton de Tournefort, attests that the Shah did not force Armenians to adopt

<sup>105</sup>H. K'iwrdean, *Jughayets'i khoja Nazar ...*, p. 32.

<sup>106</sup>Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, vol. 3, p. 75-76.



Islam, since their being Christian facilitated their trade relations with the European countries.<sup>107</sup>

The Armenians were fully conscious of the real reasons of the Shah's "Christianophilia." Thus, Arakel of Davrezh, calling Shah Abbas I the "Hellish Dragon," has explained the real reasons for his tolerant behavior toward the Armenians in terms of exploiting them for his own interests.<sup>108</sup>

The implementation of the Safavid kings' political and economic plans relating to the Armenian merchant class was done in a short time. Thanks to New Julfa, as early as during the reign of Shah Abbas I, the nation's capital, Isfahan, became a major center of the international trade. Numerous commodities flowed in here from China, India, Central Asia, Arabia, Turkey, and Europe.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, since the early seventeenth century, a large segment of the Armenian merchant bourgeoisie, due to unfavorable historical conditions, was forced to function outside their ancestral homeland.

The grateful khojas, generously paid back the Shah for the privileges granted to them, contributing significantly to the state treasury. Shah Abbas I was known to say, "One Armenian pays me more taxes than ten Mohammedans."

In order to invigorate the economic life of Iran and increase the revenues of the state treasury, the Shah resorted to various means. For example, he organized fabric-spinning factories where a large number of foremen were obliged to provide compulsory free of charge services.<sup>110</sup> Besides the raw silk, he declared a state monopoly on precious stone mines, metal mines, minting of coins and exchange. However, he attempted enthusiastically to boost foreign trade, specifically, the export of silk. This not only provided him with opportunities to enrich the treasury, and gain access to indispensable commodities from abroad, but also to deal a blow to the political

<sup>107</sup>Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un Voyage du Levant*, (Paris, 1718), t. II, p. 158.

<sup>108</sup>A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'iwn*, p. 25, 199.

<sup>109</sup>Roger Savori, *Iran Under the Safavids*, (Cambridge, 1980), p. 100.

<sup>110</sup>Pietro Della Valle, *Reiss-Beschrei bung in unterchiedlichen Theilen der Welt*, II (Cenf, 1674), p. 74.

rival, the Ottoman Empire, depriving it of the huge profits of the silk trade. The Shah presumed that the high quality and low-priced Iranian silk could be competitive, in a short period of time, to the Turkish silk, and, thus, damage the Turkish silk trade with the Western countries.

The main difficulty in the achievement of these objectives was the issue of the proper structuring of the silk export to the markets in the Levant and the European countries. The trips of the foreign merchants to Iran in the early seventeenth century were insignificant. The Iranian merchants (Persians, Jews, etc) mainly engaged in domestic trade,<sup>111</sup> and rarely went to the European countries. Numerous attempts by the Shah to attract them to foreign trade did not produce the desired outcome. Furthermore, they did not justify the Shah's aspirations.<sup>112</sup> Subsequent to the sale of the ruler's own silk in Europe, several merchants who went abroad did not return to Iran. They spent their fortunes on women, and lewd and licentious living.<sup>113</sup> Apparently, such incidents were so widespread that the Senate of Venice had to bring it to the attention of the Shah.<sup>114</sup>

Particularly in Europe, Muslims were treated with mistrust, and sometimes with animosity, which impeded their traveling both within the specific country and across borders.

In order to solve these difficulties, Shah Abbas dispatched to Europe Anthony Sherley, the Englishman who was in his service, to meet the German Kaiser Rudolph, the Roman Pope, the Doge of Venice, and the King of Spain. The Shah gave Anthony Sherley, whom he called "Mirza Antonio", the task to declare in Europe that the borders of Iran were open to European merchants for trade, and to sign trade agreements.<sup>115</sup> The Shah ordered the Englishman to spare

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<sup>111</sup>Bells *Travels in Asia. A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels* by John Pincerton (London, 1811), p. 283.

<sup>112</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, p.623.

<sup>113</sup>Rashid Yasemi, *Tarikh-i Iran*, (Tehran, 1322/1943), p. 84.

<sup>114</sup>S. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Djuga*, p. 83.

<sup>115</sup>See Edward Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, (London, 1933).

no efforts, making generous promises so that the European merchants of various nations would be incorporated in the Iranian trade.<sup>116</sup> One of the most important missions of Anthony Sherley was to arrange for the signing of an anti-Turkish military treaty between Iran and the European states, or at least to probe the possibilities for one. The delegation which was headed by Hussein Ali-Beg Bayat, a confidante of the royal court, left for Europe in 1599. However, almost none of the eighteen Persian members of the group returned to Iran.<sup>117</sup> The three secretaries of the delegation, Ali Quli Khan, Bonayed Beg and Oruj Beg, converted to Christianity and remained in Spain, accepting the names of Don Philip, Don Diego, and Don Juan respectively. Some other members of the delegation stayed on in Rome and were later proselytized by the Jesuits and adopted Catholicism.<sup>118</sup>

Despite vigorous negotiations conducted in various European countries, the mission failed. The outcome left a depressing impact on the Shah. His efforts to attract foreign merchants and trade companies to Iran proper did not produce substantial results, chiefly because early seventeenth century Iran, as was mentioned above, was not thoroughly incorporated in Europe's trade-economic interest circles, and European merchants visited Iran only occasionally. Under these circumstances, Shah Abbas I had few options to choose from.

In order to realize his large-scale commercial plans, particularly of the export of Iranian raw silk to the international markets, Shah Abbas I, decided to employ the Armenian merchants resettled in Iran. He took into consideration not only their extensive experience in international markets, but also the fact that during their travels in the Ottoman Empire, they met with relatively more tolerance than the Shiite Persians, and in Europe they were received as Christian brothers. The French traveler Chardin lays a special emphasis on this point. The "Shah brought those Armenians to his capital as his subjects, who were better tuned to do business with the Turks as well as

<sup>116</sup>Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia* (London, 1930) vol. II, p. 177.

<sup>117</sup>Sir Anthony Sherley, *His Relation of His Travels into Persia* (London, 1613).

<sup>118</sup>L. L. Bellan, *Shah Abbas I, Sa Vie, Son Histoire* (Paris, 1932), pp.95-97, 135-36.

Christians, since the former hated them not as much as the Persians, and the latter shared with them the same religion."

According to Jean Baptiste Tavernier, "Shah Abbas turned to the Armenians, who were found more suitable in the realization of his intentions. He well understood that they were dynamic and tireless people, capable of making long trips and were very temperate during the feasts, and parsimonious, and as long as they were Christians they could easily do business with the entire Christian world."<sup>119</sup> The Englishman, Thomas Herbert, also testifies that the government supported the private initiatives of the Armenians in every way and took advantage of their trade acumen for the export of the court-owned silk.<sup>120</sup>

In order to encourage the resettled Armenian merchants and their trade activities, the Shah allotted to the merchants of Julfa interest free loans and goods that enabled them to quickly revive their trade connections.

According to Pietro Della Valle, as the Shah's officers transported the raw silk from the provinces to the capital, the Shah called for more experienced Julfa merchants, and giving them dozens of bales of raw silk, dispatched them to the European countries to arrange the sale. The Europeans residing in Iran, having expertise in international prices for silk, would first appraise the silk given to the Armenian merchants for export.<sup>121</sup>

The Armenians paid for the silk given by the Shah on their return from abroad.<sup>122</sup>

Documents published by Ghevond Alishan include the names of the Julfa merchants sent by the Shah to Europe. One of these documents reads: "On August 14, 1608 AD, an individual named Hovhannes, the son of Martiros from Julfa, was dispatched by the

<sup>119</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>120</sup>Thomas Herbert, *Relation du voyage de Perse et des Indes Orientales* (Paris, 1663), pp. 263-5, 388-9

<sup>121</sup>Pietro Della Valle, *Voyages dans la Turquie, L'Egypte, La Palestine, La Perse, les Indes Orientales et autres lieux*, t. IV (Rouen, 1745), p. 417.

<sup>122</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, p. 54.

Shah to Constantinople with goods. From there he took the load to Venice. In September 1609, another group of Julfa merchants, including Ter Gabriel, son of Andreas, Galabeg, son of Ter Sahak, and Khoja Oulugh, son of Ali Beg, left for Venice with 13 bales of silk.<sup>123</sup>

To guarantee the export and sale of the Iranian silk and other commodities, the Shah, in every way, encouraged the Armenian merchants' efforts to identify new and free markets with easy access.<sup>124</sup>

A common ground of interest was being found between the Safavid government and the Armenian merchant class—a kind of alliance that was mutually beneficial. The government created for the khojas favorable conditions for trade, and the latter, through their commercial activity, brought huge revenues to the royal treasury.

Pietro Della Valle aptly mentions that for the King, the merchants of Julfa were what the Genoese were for the Spanish King. They could not survive without the King, even as the King could not manage without them.<sup>125</sup>

Broad royal monopolies granted to the Armenian merchant class, and the favorable conditions for trade offered the khojas of New Julfa unprecedented possibilities to expand their commercial activities, the foreign trade of Iran in particular. As a result, the international center of the silk trade was transferred to the Armenian town of New Julfa, whose khojas became major counter-agents of the silk export that was declared a state monopoly, "shahlugh".

Thus, the massive deportation of Armenians to Iran and the devastation and depopulation of Armenia had an awful impact on the trade-economic life of the region, and resulted in the complete demise of Eastern Armenia. Consequently, the Armenian merchant bourgeoisie, as well as artisans would go abroad and continue their work in the Diaspora. From this point of view, the Iranian-Armenian community, and particularly New Julfa, was to play an exceptionally important role in the life of the Armenian people.

<sup>123</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 419.

<sup>124</sup>Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago, 1973), p. 377.

<sup>125</sup>Pietro Della Valle, *Voyages dans la Turquie . . .*, p. 263.

The death of Shah Abbas I in 1629 did not result in fundamental changes in the policies of the Safavid government towards the Armenian merchant class. Following the example of his predecessor, Shah Safi I (1629-1642) continued the traditional supportive policy towards them, as observed by the Frenchman, Gabriel Chinon. "The government sponsored major Armenian merchants and encouraged their trade, intending to exploit their experience and broad trade connections for the export and sale of raw silk."<sup>126</sup>

The new Shah not only respected the rights and privileges earlier granted to the Armenians, he also added new favors. Thus, in 1633, he issued a decree wherein he ordered all the customs officials of the State, provincial governors, and the road guards to refrain from creating difficulties for the Armenian merchants. They were instructed to assist them in every way possible, not hinder their movements within the country, and no customs duties were to be collected from them.<sup>127</sup> Besides that, the Shah maintained the low taxes assessed by Shah Abbas I for New Julfa. Thereafter, the city enjoyed limited tax immunity. According to Adam Olearius, the Armenians of Julfa were to pay the Shah a flat tax of two hundred tumans each year. This amount was to be deposited in the state treasury by the darugha of Julfa, Khosrow Sultan and Kalantar Serferaz (Sarfrac) Beg.<sup>128</sup> The same Adam Olearius notes that during the reign of Shah Sefi, prominent New Julfa merchants participated in many festivities as part of the royal entourage. For instance, when the German envoys organized a "princely feast," in addition to the Russian minister-counselor, several important figures from the English East India Company, French diplomats, missionaries of the Spanish Augustinian order, and Italian Carmelite friars, also

<sup>126</sup>Gabriel Chinon, *Relation nouvelle du Levant* (Lyon, 1671), p. 225.

<sup>127</sup>H. K'iwrdean, *Niut'er vacharakanut'ean patmutedan (Hum metak'si arewture ew hayere) (arandznatip)* [Materials for the History of Trade (The Raw Silk Trade and the Armenians)] Special edition, p. 22.

<sup>128</sup>*Podrobnoye opisaniye puteshestviya golshhtinskogo posolstva v Moskoviyu i Persiyu v 1633, 1636 i 1639 g.g., sostavlennoye sekretaryem posolstva Adamom Oleariem* [Detailed Description of the Voyage of Holstein Diplomatic Legation to Muscovy and Persia in 1633, 1636 and 1639, Written by Adam Olearius, Secretary of the Legation], (Moscow, 1870), p. 73 l.

present at the feast by the invitation of the Shah were the governor of New Julfa and his two brothers.<sup>129</sup>

The state monopoly on silk introduced by Shah Abbas I became a problem during the last years of his life. According to Iskandar Bek Munshi, the court historian, it led to exploitation and extortion by rapacious royal officials, which in turn caused discontent among the silk producing peasantry.<sup>130</sup> Even during the lifetime of Shah Abbas, revolts had erupted constantly in the province of Gilan.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, Safi I, on inheriting his throne, hastened to issue a decree to repeal the state monopoly on silk.

The free trade of silk was extremely beneficial to the Armenians, because they could now make direct contact with the silk producers without interference from intermediaries. The merchants of Julfa ceased being the "royal" agents, in charge of managing the export of raw silk, and began to engage in the export of silk as independent tradesmen, purchasing directly from the producers and exporting it as their own merchandise. In addition the Iranian peasants would turn over a considerable part of the raw silk in lieu of the local taxes and duties to the royal government or to the local feudal administrators. Therefore, the Armenian merchants, who made wholesale purchases of that silk for export, in fact, became agents and functionaries of the feudal rent system.

Also, it is conceivable that the termination of the state monopoly was also a blow to the competitors of the Armenian khojas, the English merchants. For the latter, it was extremely tough to establish regular contact with the silk producing centers of Northern Iran. Furthermore, in accordance with the agreement signed with His Majesty's government, the British were obligated to make their purchases only from the Iranian Royal Court, not from the free market.

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<sup>129</sup>Podrobnoye . . . , p. 718.

<sup>130</sup>Iskandar bek Torkman (Munshi), Va mohammad yusef movarekh. zeyl *Tarikh alam arayi Abbasi betashih* Soheyli Khwansari (Tehran, 1317/1938), p. 130.

<sup>131</sup>I. P. Petrushevski, "Narodnoe vosstanie v Gilane v 1629 g.," *Ucheyniye zapiski Instituta vostokovedeniya*, T.3 [Popular Uprising in Gilan in 1629], (Moscow, 1951), vol. 3, pp. 226-28.



It is no coincidence that after the removal of the silk monopoly by Shah Safi I, the British decisively curtailed their silk exports from Iran, in anticipation of more favorable times, and in 1641, they stopped their export of silk from Iran.

The Dutch were more flexible than the British and were able to maneuver their trade policies with skill. They managed to obtain silk both from the court and the free market. However, that did not produce the desired results either, because they too had difficulties in establishing regular contacts with the silk producing centers. They also continuously faced hurdles in purchasing the silk directly from peasants. Thus, the Dutch had to depend on the services of the Armenian merchants, who acted as intermediaries between the silk exporters and the Dutch.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, the Dutch had to give up their long cherished plan for a monopoly over silk exports. They had to compromise and yield their positions to the Armenian merchants.

The Armenian merchants were well established in international trade, and associated with a wide variety of countries and people. Grigor Daranaghts'i writes that the merchants of Julfa "used to travel everywhere in the world." For example, "in inland India, Ethiopia and Egypt, the whole world of Franks (Europe), Constantinople, and the entire territory of Trace, Moscow (Russia), Georgia, the entire territory of Turkey and Kurdistan, and the country of Khalds, Persia, and in the East all the way to China, Indochina, Tun, Tuncha, also England, and the land of Tartars, Abkhazs, and the unexplored corners of the world."<sup>133</sup>

Kostand Jughayets'i in his *Ashkharhazhoghov* (General Collection), which is a textbook on trade, trade routes, currencies, weights and measures used worldwide, lists the names of those cities and provinces that the Armenian merchants, those of Julfa in particular, visited on business. These cities and provinces were: in Iran and in Transcaucasus—Isfahan, Mashad, Tabriz, Resht, Gilan, Mazandaran,

<sup>132</sup>Niels Steensgaard, *The Asia Trade Revolution...*, p. 392

<sup>133</sup>Grigor Daranaghts'i, *Zhamanakagrut'wn* [Chronicle of Grigor Vardapet Daranaghts'i or Kamakhets'il, (Jerusalem, 1915), p. 457-58.



Gaskar, Kesman, Lahijan, Ganja, Karabagh, Shirvan, Shamakhi; in Central Asia, Afghanistan and Northern India—Balkh, Bukhara, Kandahar, Ghazni, Peshavar, Kabul, Kashmir, etc.

In the Arab countries—Arabistan (Arabian Peninsula), Basra, Baghdad, Mosul, and Aleppo. In Turkey—the cities of Constantinople, Bursa, Atrana (Adana V.B.) Izmir, Tokat, Erzerum, and Ethiopia in Africa.

In Europe—Mesina, Alikorna (Livorno), Venice, Genoa, Marseilles, Amsterdam, Danzig (Gdansk), Moscow, Leh (Poland) and Magyar (Hungary), Alaman (Germany), Frankstan (France), Enklter (England), Spain, "yenki dunya" (America), etc.

Kostand Jughayets'i also writes: "Moving from East to West, we stop first in Mltan (Multan), Lahur, Sarhind, Jahanabad, Akbarabad, Khurja, and Hndwan, Bankala, Bist, Patna, Benares, Mov, Ghazipur, Jalalpur, Shahzadpur, Kherabad, Daryabad, Doulatabad, Srinj, Berampur, Surat, Gujarat, Ovrnkabad, Shagarn, Hyderabad, Mushlibandar, Pegu, Hava (which is the capital of King Pekva), Butan (Bhutan), Khata, and Khuta, Zirapat, Kochin, Celan (Sri Lanka), Malaga, Jakarta which some referred to as Batavia, Trnat (Trinidad), Amburn, Mukasar, Timor, Slhorn, Manila, and Sharinov."<sup>134</sup>

Naturally, the Armenian khojas who traded in all corners of the world needed not only trade directories such as Kostand Jughayets'i's *Ashkharhazhoghov*, but also geographic maps. In 1696, the famous publishers, Tovma and Ghukas of Vanand, published *Hamatarats ashkharhats'oyts'* (General Geography) which they describe as follows: "This is of special use to merchants, Armenian merchants in particular, who among the Asian and all Eastern nations have a reputation for being skillful and bright. They are well accepted and not less liked everywhere, and traveling throughout the whole world, often visit all the countries."<sup>135</sup>

<sup>134</sup>M. Mashtots'i anwan Matenadaran, dzer. No. 5994, e] 3a-3b [Matenadaran named after M. Mashtots, manuscript no. 5994] pp. 3a-3b. See also H. Ter-Hovhancants, *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, vol. 1, pp. 159-160

<sup>135</sup>Ghukas Vanandets'i, *Banali hamataratsi ashkharhats'uts'in meroy noratsni* [Key to the General Geography], (Amsterdam, 1696), pp. 2-3.

The khojas not only enriched the royal treasury, they also amassed huge wealth themselves. The turnover of their capital reached millions. According to Tavernier, one of the Armenian khojas on his death, left a legacy of forty million tumans.<sup>136</sup>

Did the empowerment of the New Julfa merchant bourgeoisie contribute to their political activism? The answer to this question has usually been in the negative. More specifically, the prevailing idea has been that the vanguard of the Armenian merchant class, the khojas of New Julfa, kept away from the political interests of the Armenian nation. It has been presumed that they were a class manifesting political apathy and took conformist positions towards the rulers, rather than to stand up for the cause of the liberation of their nation. Furthermore, it has been noted that the Armenian merchant bourgeoisie of the immigrant communities in the seventeenth century had opposed the emancipation notions of its own people.<sup>137</sup> It was only during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Armenian merchant class entered the trade-industrialization stage that they gradually started to express interest in the Armenian national-political issues.

Even prominent historian and academician A. G. Hovhannisian, who considered this issue as being beyond the scope of his research, writes: " They constitute a privileged petty bourgeois class whose social morality was determined by the markers of the abacus. They were people who, by bowing their heads before their rulers, tried to pave the way towards their well-being, and yet they were indifferent towards the fate of their own wretched and miserable compatriots. Merchants of this kind had all the reasons to avoid the underwater reefs of national politics, and as needed, they gained their personal comfort with the help of money."<sup>138</sup>

Evidence of the inactivity and apathy of the Armenian khojas of New Julfa in national politics, is often cited through a dialogue

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<sup>136</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages ...*, pp. 418-19.

<sup>137</sup>See Leo, *Khoyayakan kapital*.

<sup>138</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner ...*, vol. II, p. 458.

paraphrased in the seventeenth century Armenologist Joachim Schroder's work titled *Aramian lezvin gandz* (The Armenian Language Treasure). This is a conversation between a European, named Francisco with Khoja Safar, who visited Amsterdam on business from New Julfa. According to this source, the European inquires about the political status of the Armenian people. However, Khoja Safar, as is obvious from the dialogue, avoids the subject. He even declares that the Armenians neither have a political issue and nor do they wish to have one. "Nowadays our nation enjoys more peace than at the time of our kings. We are not obligated to go to war, and are free to visit any country and contact any nation."<sup>139</sup> Leo interprets the views expressed by the merchant khoja in the following way. "The Armenian does not even need to have his own king. Should he have one, he has to go to war, whereas now he does not fight and freely does trade with all nations."<sup>140</sup>

Undoubtedly, in the seventeenth century, such mentality was typical of the dominant Armenian class. An Armenian cleric of the eighteenth century, Gevorg Mkhleyimian, though for different reasons, reiterating what Khoja Safar, says, writes: "The Eastern Christians, although they do not have a king, however, enjoy more peace and calm than in the period of their own kingdom."<sup>141</sup>

However, it cannot be generalized that such views represent the entire community of the Armenians in New Julfa.

Numerous facts disclaim the concept of political passivity of New Julfa's Armenian khoja class. Moreover, since the early seventeenth century, its weight in national affairs grew steadily; more precisely, it comprised the leadership of the Armenian national life. Many issues of pan-Armenian significance were resolved with the knowledge, participation and resources of New Julfa Armenians.

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<sup>139</sup>J. Joachim Schroder, *Aramean lezvin gandz*, Thesaurus linguae Armeniacae (Amsterdam, 1711), p. 338-39.

<sup>140</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital*, p. 171.

<sup>141</sup>*Ararat amsagir* [Ararat magazine], (Etchmiadzin, 1871), p. 102.

"Julfa became truly authoritative, and without its consent not a single national issue of significance could be addressed and resolved. Even Etchmiadzin was subject to it to some extent. At the Catholicos' election, the casting vote belonged to it."<sup>142</sup> Catholic missionary Piromalli, with extensive evangelical experience in mid-seventeenth century Armenia, has emphasized the great influence of New Julfa Armenians in the life of the Armenian Church. According to Piromalli, "They (New Julfa Armenians), had enough power to dismiss upon their wish any vartabed (archdeacon), bishop, and even the Catholicos."<sup>143</sup>

In the second half of the seventeenth century, Etchmiadzin was turned into a center for the generation of national-liberation concepts. It is not accidental that the Armenian merchant bourgeoisie supported those aspirations. In the meantime, it stood up for the independence of the Armenian Apostolic Church, its doctrine and ancient traditions.

The exceptional status that the *khoja* elite enjoyed within the borders of the Safavid Kingdom explains "the fondness of the major *khoja* families for Iran, their host country."<sup>144</sup> It should not be forgotten that the Armenian *khojas* had close economic relations with the upper classes of the Safavids. We should note that the welfare of the *khojas*, in the wider outlook, depended on Iran's trade policy. The *khojas'* trade can be considered as a service rendered to the Iranian feudal elite. The "Armenian merchants exported and sold the surplus products which under the pretext of rent, taxes and fees were accumulated in the depots of the feudal lords, and supplied them merchandise (mainly luxury items), purchased in the foreign markets."<sup>145</sup> Ashot Hovhannissian notes: "The Armenian *khoja* capital itself was not the outcome of new modes of production. The Armenian *khoja* accumulated his wealth through the circulation of commercial and

<sup>142</sup>Leo, *Haykakan t'pagrut'iwn, Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, h.5 [The Armenian Printing, Collection of Works], vol.5, (Erevan, 1986), p. 194.

<sup>143</sup>Karapet Epis. Amatuni, *Voskan Vardapet Erevantsi ew w'ir zhamanake* [Archdeacon Voskan Erevantsi and His Time], (Venice, 1975), p. 119.

<sup>144</sup>A. Hovhannissian, *Drwagner . . .*, p. 104.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 455.

lending capital that was fused together with the feudal system. Thus, it is understandable that he did not take an antagonistic stance toward the feudal regime. This factor conditioned not only his economic practice, but also his extreme national-political moderation.<sup>146</sup>

These are indisputable facts. However, it is also true that the Armenian merchants found themselves in a dilemma. As the representatives of the merchant-lending class, they looted the people. However, they themselves were subject to national and religious pressures.

Therefore, the Armenian merchant class was compelled always to be cautious and alert, and manifest itself as a politically neutral element. The Frenchman Jean Chardin, for example, asserts that the New Julfa khojas, being aware of Catholicos Hakob Jughayetsi's negotiations with Rome on the liberation of Armenia through the assistance of European powers, were apprehensive about a possible retaliation from the Iranian Kingdom.<sup>147</sup> Such fears were not groundless, especially when many of the Armenians, forcefully deported to Iran, complained about the brutality of the Safavid authorities, and dreamt of liberation, with the support of the "Franks", not only from the Turkish, but also the Iranian yoke.<sup>148</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, the khojas of New Julfa began to play a distinctive role in the promotion of the national-cultural advancement of the Armenian people. In the late sixteenth century, Hovhannes Terznts'i published in Marseilles a series of books with financial contributions by old Julfa merchants. Later, in New Julfa and in Protestant Holland, Armenian publishing was established. Given the Armenian realities, publishing was organized not just for the sake of business. It definitely carried national-political significance and aimed to contribute to the Armenian liberation movement. For the New Julfa' khojas, who were financing the publishing houses, books were not merely a commodity for sale, but also a powerful tool for

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<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>147</sup>Jean Chardin, *Voyage en Perse*, Paris, 1811, t.II, pp. 16-17.

<sup>148</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 104.

the realization of political aspirations nurtured by the Armenian merchants. It is not accidental that the *magnum opus* of the Armenian classical historiography, *History of Armenia* by Movses Khorenats'i, as well as *History* by Arakel Davrizhets'i, were published in Amsterdam. The purpose of these publications was to educate and nurture the patriotic spirit among the Armenian youth, who, according to Tovma Vanandets'i "were in the dark and lived under a tyrannical yoke."

Apparently the printing press in the seventeenth century also expressed the rising aspirations for liberation of the Armenian people and increased the political will to get rid of foreign bondage.

The regular contacts of the Armenian merchants involved in international commerce with various European nations, thus, were not inconsequential. First, they widened the horizons of the Armenian merchants. They imported to Iran and disseminated among the Armenian population, especially from Europe, not only European goods, but also the prevalent Western ideas.

It is important to underscore that if in that epoch the Armenian clergy, as in the past, persistently continued to associate the prospect of Armenia's liberation with Rome, then the *khojas* of New Julfa denied the deceptive illusion of liberation by the efforts of the "Franks." In this regard, we find numerous facts in two extensive volumes of *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*.<sup>149</sup> Thus, in 1613, when Catholicos Melikset sent an official letter to Rome without the consent of the New Julfa *khojas* expressing readiness to accept the supremacy of the Roman Pope, the *khojas*, immediately convinced the king to arrest the Catholicos so that his decision would be declared null and void.<sup>150</sup> And then, in 1607, at the instigation of Catholic missionaries, Shah Abbas I ordered the destruction of the Etchmiadzin cathedral and the removal of its stones and sacred relics to Isfahan, with the intention of building a church there.<sup>151</sup> Undoubtedly, the purpose of that

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<sup>149</sup>See *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, vol. I and vol. II.

<sup>150</sup>G. V. Galemk'arean, *Kensagrut'iwinner* [Biographies], (Vienna, 1915) p. 44.

<sup>151</sup>A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'iw'n*, pp. 212-13.

decision was to deal a blow to the foundations of the Armenian National Church and to make the Armenians lose their strong spiritual link with the motherland. However, due the persistent protests of the khojas of New Julfa, and the kalantar (mayor) Khoja Nazar in particular, the Shah decided to give up that idea.<sup>152</sup>

There was another factor too. The Armenian khojas were often subjected to complete disregard for their national and religious feelings,<sup>153</sup> and unfair persecution in the Western European Catholic countries. This was a result of contradiction between the overzealous Catholic missionaries and the Armenians, the followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The missionaries, eager to achieve success in their proselytizing efforts among the Armenians, used all available leverages to pressure them. In return, the Julfa merchants adopted a hostile stance not only towards the missionaries and the Catholic Church, but sometimes also towards the Western European powers.

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<sup>152</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegnut'iwanner. H. Ter-Hovhaneants', Patmut'iwn Nor Jughayu*, I, pp. 52-56.

<sup>153</sup>M. V. Ughurdean, *Patmut'iwn hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean ew shinut'ean ekeghets'woy notsa i Livornoy kaghaki* [History of Armenian Emigration and Construction of Their Churches in the Town of Livorno], (Venice, 1891), pp. 46-48.



## Armenians and the Levantine Trade in the Seventeenth Century

In the Middle Ages, as in the modern times, the geographical term Levant referred to the countries of the East Mediterranean: the entire Asia Minor, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and so forth. Since ancient times, the Levant has constituted one of the important junctions of international trade. The Crusades of the medieval period led to the establishment of direct, sustained ties between the Levant and Europe. At that time, the Mediterranean Sea became the main trade route leading to the East. The volume of the trade turnover with Iran, Greece, and Arabia reached an unprecedented scale. The Italian commercial cities of Venice, Genoa, Pisa, and Amalfi earned huge profits from this trade.

The economic upturn of the Mediterranean countries had an immediate impact on the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, which, as observed earlier, was a center of the Mediterranean commerce. The prominent Armenian Cilician merchants became solidly entrenched in the international trade and maintained this positions until the fall of the Cilician Armenian Kingdom in 1375.

Even after the decline of the Mediterranean port of Ayas and loss of its mercantile prominence, the Armenians continued to play a predominant role in the Levantine trade. Adapting to the newly formed political and economic environment, they continued to have a



significant position in the East-West international trade. At that time, the Ayas-Tabriz road became one of the major trade routes, being the pulse of the trade leading to the Syrian seashore from Tabriz. Through this junction, the Levant interacted with the Muslim East, as well as India and China. The Italian merchants gained ascendancy in this major trans-Asian commerce, and were known for their lack of tolerance of the local competitors. Perhaps that was why, after the fall of the Cilician Kingdom, the Armenian merchants mainly settled in the Crimea.

Since the late fifteenth century, the Armenian merchants were overwhelmingly involved in the Levantine trade through the traditional route crossing Turkey, which extended towards the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the hub of the Levantine trade. They gained dominance particularly on the transit routes which passed through Iran. (It has to be noted that the term "Armenian merchants" refers not only to those of Armenia, but also those of Iran, Syria, Egypt, and the Armenian merchants of other Diaspora communities.)

The Turkish conquests and consequent closure of the road connecting Europe to the East expedited the search for sea routes leading to India. At the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, major geographical discoveries put an end to the monopoly of the Levantine trade. Moreover, the Levantine trade declined because it was transferred from the land routes to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

Of course, it was not as if there was complete termination of the Levantine trade. Its durability, first of all, was warranted by the growth of the Ottoman Empire's own interests: commercial taxes gradually played an essential role for the treasury of the Sultanate. On the other hand, the monopoly of the Portuguese over the routes leading to India necessitated the maintenance of this trade. Dictating the prices, they sold Indian spices in Europe at twenty-four times the purchase price.<sup>1</sup> Also, one should not forget that the Levantine products reached Europe through the Mediterranean markets. The Levant was also the

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<sup>1</sup>P. Harris, "An Aleppo Merchant Letter Book," *The British Museum Quarterly*, vol. 22 (1960). p. 67.

main market through which Persian silk was transported to the European countries, which constituted the main consumers of raw silk and silk textiles. Silk was of primary importance in the international trade between the East and the West. In early sixteenth century Europe, the manufacture of silk garments increased to such an extent that the locally produced raw materials no longer sufficed. There was a huge demand for imports from the East, specifically from Iran, which had become one of the major centers of silk production. The Iranian raw silk was considered to be of excellent quality. (The main centers of its production were: Gilan, Mazandaran, Georgia, and Armenia (Siunik and Artsakh).)

However, the occasional Turco-Iranian wars, the insecurity of the Turkish trade routes, the unfamiliarity of the European merchants with the land caravan routes, and other reasons, made it impossible for Europeans to establish trade relations with Iran and organize the export of silk to Europe through Turkey. The English merchants had begun to search for new routes toward the East, specifically attempting to reach the silk production centers in Shirvan and Gilan through Russia. However, these attempts did not succeed. In 1600, the efforts of the English East India Company to export silk by sea also met with failure.

Such was the state of affairs that for the Europeans, the sole resolution of this important problem was once again envisioned in the utilization of the intermediary services of the Armenian merchants. Thus, since the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the sphere of raw silk export through the land routes, the Armenians no longer had any competitors.

The Armenian merchants residing in the Levantine cities of Sis, Ayas, Adana, Garaman, Hromkla, Aleppo, Beirut, Tripoli, Constantinople, Smyrna (Zmiurnia), Thessaloniki, Alexandria, Alexandretta (Hayots Tsots), as well as the Armenian khojas, living in both parts of Armenia (Western and Eastern), as well as other areas of the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran were actively involved in the Levantine trade.

It is no accident that there was a conflict of interests and controversies between the Western and Eastern constituents of the Armenian trade. In this regard, we find evidence in the "Chronicle" of Grigor Daranaghts'i.<sup>2</sup>

In 1536, King Francis I of France signed a capitulatory agreement with Sultan Suleyman I, the Magnificent, that permitted France to establish a permanent Embassy in Constantinople as well as Consulates in desired locales of the Empire. French subjects were permitted to conduct trade in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, and those residing in Turkey gained extraterritorial rights, that is, they were not liable to the jurisdiction of the Turkish court.

In the Levant, the European powers, namely the Venetian republic, France, England, Holland and others, with the permission of the Sultans, had established consulates, which also served as commercial missions. The responsibility of dealing with the Eastern merchants was put on their shoulders.

In the Levantine cities, the Armenians worked not only as the commercial agents of the Europeans but also as interpreters since many of them had mastered several languages.<sup>3</sup>

Every European state, in an attempt to gain a dominant position in the traditional Levantine routes and sparing no efforts to become a major importer of the raw Iranian silk, Armenian cotton and other Eastern goods, tried to obtain concessions, trade licenses and monopolies from the Ottoman government. Thus, in 1553, the English sea explorer, Anthony Jenkins, received from Sultan Suleyman Qanuni a trade license which classified England as among the "most favored nations."<sup>4</sup>

The Armenian merchants in the Levantine markets, as mentioned earlier, acted as intermediaries, a position that from several perspectives was not beneficial to them. First of all, the Europeans themselves

<sup>2</sup>Gr. Daranaghts'i, *Zhamanakagrut'ivn.*

<sup>3</sup>K. S. Papazian, *Merchants from Ararat. A Brief Survey of Armenian Trade Through the Ages*, (New York, 1979), pp. 18, 27.

<sup>4</sup>*Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, (London, 1893), p.5.

determined the prices of the goods, often reducing the prices or boycotting some shipments to force the Armenian merchants to be more compromising. Therefore, as we will see below, in order to escape heavy overhead expenses, the Armenian *khojas* involved in wholesale trade tried to ship their goods directly to Europe, and, thus, avoid the pressurizing tactics of the European consuls in the Levant, and, of course, amass profits.

The presence of the large Armenian communities in the commercial centers of the Levant significantly facilitated the activities of the Armenian merchants, and increased the level of their competitiveness. For example, in Aleppo, which due to its geographical position, constituted one of the major commercial centers of the world, in the fifteenth century had already established Armenian community with its churches, holy places, hotels; etc.<sup>5</sup>

The Armenian community of Aleppo was established in the fourteenth century, after the fall of Armenian Cilicia. The Armenians who migrated there comprised mainly of the merchants and nobility.<sup>6</sup> Already in 1470, there was an Armenian church of the Holy Virgin. The records of that time refer to the fact that under the auspices of that Church and upon the order of Mr. Farach, Melikset the scribe, had copied a Bible.<sup>7</sup> In 1500, a holy shrine called Forty Children (in Armenian, *karasun mankants*) and a hotel were built. In the two Armenian cemeteries named Salibe and Azize, fourteen inscribed tombstones of the sixteenth century have been discovered, thirteen of which belong to "outlander *khojas* from [Old] Julfa in the city of Aleppo".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>A. K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Domination*, (Cambridge, 1965), p. 46.

<sup>6</sup>Artawazd arqepiskopos Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'wn Halepi hayots'*, vol. II, p. 420.

<sup>7</sup>*ZhyE dari hayeren dzeragreri hishatakaraner, Masn II (1451-1480 t't.)*, [Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (1451-1480)], kazmets' L. S. Khachikyan, (Erevan, 1958), p. 433.

<sup>8</sup>A. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'wn Halepi azgayin gerezmanatants' ew ardzanagir hayeren tapanak'areru [History of Armenian Cemeteries in Aleppo and Inscriptions of Armenian Tombstones]*, (Aleppo, 1935), pp.12-13, 25.

In the sixteenth century, which saw the unprecedented rise of the Armenian merchants' commercial activities, Aleppo became one of the focal points of the Levantine trade, playing a leading role in the exchange of goods between Asia (India, Iran, Transcaucasus) and Europe (mainly Venice). According to European travelers, in the sixteenth century, along with Arabs, Mauretanians and other merchants, the Armenians also had a strong presence there and were conducting successful businesses.<sup>9</sup> The Englishman Edwards testifies that Armenians played a leading role in Aleppo's trade. "Here," he writes, "they exchanged the Eastern goods (raw silk, crops, etc) with the merchandise brought by the Venetians."<sup>10</sup> The Armenians of Julfa in particular constituted such a large number in the town that European William Biddulph, who visited Aleppo in 1600, singled them out among the other Armenian settlers. "Aleppo," he wrote: "was inhabited by the Turks, Arabs, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Julfites, Nestorians and various other nationalities."<sup>11</sup> Second to the Julfa Armenians were the merchants from Amid (Diarbekir) and from different regions of Western Armenia. Simeon Lehats'i (the Pole) describes them as "wise, Herculean type, and handsome". These are, according to him, the characteristics of the renowned merchants of Julfa and Amid. "There were Khoja Ghandil and others who owned forty, fifty thousand loads . . . who headed with it to India, Baghdad, and Isfahan."<sup>12</sup> Between 1590 and 1630, the French, Dutch and Spanish traded in silk here, exclusively with the Armenians.<sup>13</sup>

The goods brought by the Armenian merchants to Aleppo from the various Eastern countries (Iran, India, China, Arabia) were usually transported to the Mediterranean port of Alexandretta (presently Iskenderun) and Tripoli, and later also Latakia, and from there, were exported to Europe.

<sup>9</sup>S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus* . . . , pp. 88-89.

<sup>10</sup>C. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Džuga*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus* . . . , p. 262.

<sup>12</sup>Simeon dprī lehats'woy *Ughegrut'iwñ* [Travel Account], (Vienna, 1936), pp. 319-20.

<sup>13</sup>Artawazd Ark'. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'iwñ Halepi hayots'*, p. 287.

In Aleppo, the famous merchant families of Khoja Petikents and Sanosents played the role of intermediaries between the merchants of the East and West. In Aleppo they had a commercial office through which large transactions with the European merchants took place. This commercial office had a monopoly over the purchase and sale of raw Iranian silk, and was also engaged in the import of goods produced in Europe, specifically woven items, which was sent to various cities of the Levant, and from there to the interiors of the East.

Khoja Petik was the head of the customs (Emin) of not only Aleppo, but also the whole of Syria. The customs houses of Tripoli and Alexandretta were dependent on him. Simultaneously, he was the trade representative of Holland in Aleppo.<sup>14</sup> Under the local Ottoman rulers, the prestige of Khoja Petik and his influence grew because he was the overseer of the caravanserais, bathhouses, and other public institutions of Aleppo.<sup>15</sup> Describing the wealth and influence of Khoja Petik, Simeon Lehats'i wrote: "Khoja Petik and his two brothers were riding white Arabian horses. . . . He lived like a prince, having numerous serfs, servants, and janissaries."<sup>16</sup>

However, in Turkish society, where there was no guarantee of the safety of life and property of the merchants and where violence and harassment were ordinary occurrences, Khoja Petik became the victim of intrigues, false accusations and greed. In the 1630s, he was beheaded in the Aleppo prison.<sup>17</sup> This incident underscores the fact that the tyrannical rule in the Ottoman Empire hindered the growth of the Armenian merchant bourgeoisie. Khoja Petik and others like him were not only the victims of the insatiable and ferocious appetite of the Ottomans authorities, but also of the political and commercial confrontation among the European powers—England, France, Holland, and the Republic of Venice.

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<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>A. K. Sanjian, *The Armenian Communities* . . . , p. 48-49.

<sup>16</sup>Simeon dpri Lehats'vov, *Ughegrut'wn*, p. 321.

<sup>17</sup>A. Ark'. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'wn Halepi hayots'*, p. 287.

Thus, the Venetian consul in Aleppo, in whose jurisdiction lay the promotion of the Republic's trade, constantly conspired to have the Turkish authorities remove Khoja Petik from his position. This attitude was motivated by the fact that Khoja Petik had a monopoly over the silk trade and was dictating the silk prices. However, the Venetian consul's efforts at first proved fruitless, because of the great profit the Turkish authorities in Aleppo received from Khoja Petik's trade.<sup>18</sup>

The following is another interesting fact that deserve attention. Between 1535 and 1581, when France gained the capitulation rights from Turkey, and opened consulates in Aleppo and the Mediterranean Alexandria, Zmiurnia (Smyrna, presently Izmir) and Sayda (Sidon) seaports, Anglo-French competition intensified and turned into an unprecedented struggle. In order to strike a fatal blow at their competitors, the English in a cunning move, planned to sabotage the silk trade in Aleppo, from which France, its rival, received huge profits. For that purpose, the English sent a delegation to Shah Safi, whose mission was to obtain the monopoly of the export of silk trade through the sea route: They had also the overt intention of diverting the trade from the continental routes. When this failed, the English delegation undertook the execution of its plans, for the liquidation of Khoja Petik, who, as mentioned earlier, imported to Aleppo various goods, raw silk and silk knitted products from Iran and India through his agents.<sup>19</sup>

It is appropriate to mention that the local governors, during their constant inter-feudal clashes, very often looted the holdings of the Armenian merchants. The Armenian merchants sustained especially heavy losses when the Pasha of Damascus, on several occasions between 1604-1605, surrounded and looted Aleppo, paralyzing that major center of the Levantine trade.<sup>20</sup> Pillaging, including the

<sup>18</sup>N. Steerftgaard, *The Asian Trade . . .*, p. 187.

<sup>19</sup>A. Ark'. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'iwn Halepi hayots'*, pp. 279-80.

<sup>20</sup>*The Travels of Pedro Teixeira*, (London, 1902), pp.117. Also S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus . . .* vol. 8, p. 241.

caravans arriving from Iran and Mecca, as a rule followed the uninterrupted bloody wars between the Pashas.

The silk loaded caravans of the Armenian merchants arrived in Aleppo usually through the Euphrates valley. They cut through Karin, and very often through the Tabriz–Van–Baghesh–Diarbekir–Birecik route.

In the Middle Ages, Tabriz constituted a major cultural and economic center between the East and the West. Raphael du Mans writes about Tabriz: "Tabriz is a big commercial city. It is also a major connecting center from where several routes pass over and enter the Persian territory from Constantinople, Smyrna, Bursa, Tokat, Erzerum, Erevan, Nakhijevan, Aleppo, Diarbekir, Merdin, Urfa, Bitlis, Van, Chors, Agulis, Eglis, from entire Gurjistan (Georgia) and Kurdistan, Ganja, Shamakhi, Gilan, Ardabil. In other words, it incorporates all the places near and far as a transit point leading to Isfahan. The merchants also passed through here [Tabriz] in order to go to Shamakhi, Gilan, and Ganja. These were those three cities where the Persian silk was sold."

Mentioning that the Armenian merchants of Julfa had their factories and stores in Tabriz, Raphael du Mans continues: "Their caravans brought to Iran English, French, and Venetian garments, corals, Venetian mirrors, iron from Aleppo and Smyrna. Also goods made of felt and other materials, luxury items, which as is known, were consumed quite well in Persia."<sup>21</sup>

Tabriz and Atrpatakan in general had close ties with the Ararat valley. From the latter, large quantities of rice, cotton, oil, cheese, olives, tallow, leather, fur, and other items were received.<sup>22</sup> And from Tabriz and Maku, various goods, especially various types of grain were exported to the Ararat valley.

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<sup>21</sup>Raphael du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660*, p. 332.

<sup>22</sup>Zak'aria Sarkawag Kanakerts'i, *Patmagrut'iwn [Historiography]*, (Vagharshapat, 1870), vol. II, p. 51.



The international commercial transit route of Tabriz-Smyrna, the Tabriz-Erzerum (Karin) portion of which crossed through the territory of Armenia, was significant for the exchange of goods between Safavid Iran and the Western European countries. At one end, it was connected to Central Iran via Tabriz, and from there also to Central Asia, India, and China. At the other end, it extended to the shores of the Mediterranean, and through Smyrna to the countries of the Middle East, and connected Central Asia, India, China to the major Western European trade centers such as Venice, Genoa, Florence, Livorno, Marseilles, Amsterdam, London, and other commercially prosperous cities.<sup>23</sup> The seventeenth century Armenian merchant, Zakaria Agulets'i, in his *Oragrut'ian* (Diary), has a detailed description of the above-mentioned highway. He writes that parallel to the Tabriz-Smyrna major highway, were a number of secondary roads which primarily served the domestic trade, and along with the main highway, incorporated Eastern Armenia and especially the interior provinces of the Ararat plain in the international commerce.<sup>24</sup>

For the Armenian merchants, Bursa (located close to the shore of the Sea of Marmara) was also an important center for Levantine trade. Since the end of the fourteenth century, Bursa became one of the most important commercial centers of the Anatolian Peninsula, the crossing point of all trade routes of that region. The commercial centers of Western Anatolia such as Palatia, Ephesus and Smyrna had, since 1391, come under the control of the Ottomans, and from then on were connected through trade to Bursa. Thereafter, the caravans coming from Iran crossed Bursa in order to reach the commercial seaports. Furthermore, expanding his domination in the East, Sultan Bayazid I (1360-1403) brought that trade route under his control. In the fifteenth century, the cities of Amasya and Tokat (Toas), which

<sup>23</sup>V. P'ap'azean, "T'awriz-Zmiwrnia arewtrakan mayrughu T'awriz-Erzrum hatuatsn est Zak'aria Agulets'u "Oragrut'ean", [The Tabriz-Erzerum section of Tabriz-Smyrna trade route according to the "Journal" of Zakaria Agulets'i], *Lraber hasarakakan gitut'iwnneri*, no.8 (1983), p. 61.

<sup>24</sup>Zak'aria Agulets'u *Oragrut'iwne* [The Journal of Zak'aria Agulets'i], (Erevan, 1938), p. 21.

were located on this route, were next to Bursa among Anatolia's significant political, economic, and cultural centers.

Bursa was also connected closely with the Southern Anatolian seaports of Antalya and Alanya where furthermore, Indian and Arabian goods were mainly imported.

Bursa constituted a major commercial center where the European, in particular, Venetian, Genoese, and Florentine, merchants obtained Eastern goods and sold predominantly European woolen knitted items. The growth of Bursa came about, first of all, at the expense of the Iranian silk trade. According to G. Marini, in 1501, the representative of the prominent Italian family of Medici, and *some other Florentine houses*, every year, numerous caravans loaded with silk arrived in Bursa from Iran.

One of the other major commercial centers of the Levant was Constantinople, connecting the East to the West. It occupied a markedly dominant position on the caravan routes leading the international transit from Iran to Western Europe. It had an established Armenian community since the sixth century.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent to the conquest of Constantinople by Muhammad II, the Armenian community was reduced significantly especially due to the forced migrations. In 1461, Muhammad II, by a special *firman* (decree), confirmed the existence of the Armenian community in Constantinople.

Long before the era of Shah Abbas I, the Armenian merchants of Old Julfa and its adjacent regions (Agulis, Nakhijevan, Paraka, Ghapan, etc), who conducted trade with the Black Sea ports (e.g., Kaffa) had settled in Constantinople.<sup>26</sup> The Armenian community in Constantinople in the seventeenth century numbered one hundred thousand, and had six churches.

The chronicler Grigor Daranaghts'i notes of Constantinople: "The number of Armenian merchants in this city exceeded those of all the world."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>A. Alpoyajean, *Patmut'iwn hay gaght'akanut'ean (K'ristose araj Z daren minch'ew ZhA dare K'ristosi) [History of Armenian Emigrations]*, (Cairo, 1961), vol. 3, p. 182.

<sup>26</sup>C. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Djuga*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup>Gr. Daranaghts'i, *Zhamanakagrut'iwn*, pp.168-69.

The most active participants of the international trade in Constantinople also were Western as well as Eastern Armenian merchants, among whom the Armenians of New Julfa constituted a large number. The latter were consolidated with the Turkish merchants. As a result, some accepted Islam and contributed to the emergence and further advancement of the merchant class among the local Turkish communities.<sup>28</sup>

The Armenians in Constantinople were intermediaries for the European merchants who depended on them to such an extent that they could obtain Eastern goods in the city only through the Armenian merchants. Intermediary trade for the Armenian merchants was a privilege, they enjoyed until the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The English author and traveler, George Sandys, who visited Constantinople in 1610, states that English merchants in that city obtained Persian rugs, knitted items made of goat's wool, silk taffeta, raw silk, etc, which "were brought from Persia through the land routes by Armenian merchants."<sup>30</sup>

The same Englishman admits that even in that city, where the foundations of the British commerce were more firm than in any other place in the Middle East, the trade of raw silk was predominantly in the hands of the Armenian merchants.

In the absence of personal security and safety of property in the Ottoman Empire, with a volatile political environment in the capital, and conditions of frequent mutinies, many of the Armenian merchants in Constantinople avoided permanent residence in the city. They escaped the capital of the Sultans to reside in other, safer places.

During the long-lasting Turco-Iranian wars, some Armenian merchants from New Julfa, Agulis, Nakhijevan, Ghapan, the Crimea (Kaffa) and other places who had settled in Constantinople, had to leave the

<sup>28</sup>*Bazmavep*, nos.7-8 (1928): pp. 208-15.

<sup>29</sup>R. Mantran, *Foreign Merchants and Minorities in Istanbul During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, "Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire", (New York, 1982), p. 134.

<sup>30</sup>George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey That Began in A.D. 1610*, (London, 1627), vol. I, p. 86.

capital due to the insecure political and economic conditions. The Armenian merchants from Anatolia, Western Armenia (primarily Akn, Bengian, Apucheh, and so forth), Eastern Armenia, and Armenian communities of Iran took their place.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Constantinople also served as a halfway station for Armenian merchants on their way – to move to, and anchor in, Western Europe.

Another major center of Levantine trade was Smyrna (Izmir). The significance of this harbor city in intercontinental trade began in the late sixteenth century. However, since the mid-sixteenth century, Armenian merchants had been using Smyrna as a bridging trade post to conduct business with the European countries.<sup>32</sup> According to the French historian P. Masson, the first recording of the dispensation of the Iranian silk trade in that city dates back to 1621.<sup>33</sup> However, in a short time, it became one of the major centers of the silk trade.

Regarding the commercial prominence of Smyrna, we find the following testimony by Simeon Lehats'i. "... And this was a major port where many people from Istanbul, Egypt, Venice, and residents of other places frequented, where large numbers of French and Romans resided as well".<sup>34</sup>

A large number of Armenian merchants in Smyrna were involved in wholesale trade, purchasing in one-off deals the merchandise brought by ships from Europe and by caravans from the East. One such merchant was Anton Chelebi about whose commercial activities Arakel Davrizhets'i conveys some interesting information: "... There (i.e., Smyrna) resided a Christian, named Anton Chelebi, a native of Bursa where he had his house, estate and establishments. In the city of Izmir (Smyrna), he also had an imposing dwelling and property holdings. In Constantinople as well, he had a house and a

<sup>31</sup> C. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Djuga*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> A. A. Kharatian, "Zmiwrniayi hay vacharakanut'iwne mijazgayin arewtrum (17-18rd dd.)." (*The Armenians of Smyrna in International Trade in the 17th-18th Centuries*), *Patma-Banasirakan Handes*, no. 3 (126), (1989), p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> P. Masson, *Histoire du Commerce Français dans le Levant au XVII-e siecle*, (Paris, 1896), p. 372.

<sup>34</sup> *Simeon dpri Lehats'voy, Ughegrut'iwon*, pp. 37-38.

luxurious mansion, decorated with golden and shiny ornaments. Anton was considered a very prominent figure, well known in the Ottoman and the remote French courts. Being engaged in trade, he did a lot of business with Persia. Therefore, sometimes he had to spend time in Constantinople, sometimes in Smyrna, which is Izmir. Whenever the merchant caravans arrived in Izmir from the land of Persia, he made wholesale purchases, with no selection, of all their goods, such as silk or any other products and paid them at once in cash instalment. Thus, every time merchant ships filled with valuable merchandise arrived from France, only he bought the entire cargo for which he paid immediately.<sup>35</sup>

A multitude of Western Armenian trade centers such as Karin (Erzerum), Akn, Amid (Diarbekir), Erznka (Erzincan) Baghesh, Baberd (Baibourt), Van, Archesh, Artske, Khlat, Khizan, Mush, Vostan, Akhtamar, Kharberd (Harpoot), Sgherd, and other cities played an extremely important role in the Levantine trade. Situated on major or secondary trade routes, they participated in the international transit trade.<sup>36</sup>

The presence of the Armenian communities in Asia Minor served as a continuous chain from Western Armenia to the West through various trade-economic links. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the scribe Simeon Lehats'i wrote: "From Bughdan to Istanbul, from Urumli till Venice, there was not a city or a village where Armenians did not live, spread throughout the world like dust."<sup>37</sup>

For the Levantine trade, the city of Karin (Erzerum) was yet another important transit station. It constituted one of the links connecting the land caravan routes between Iran and the Levant. The French traveler, Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, writes: "This city (Erzerum) is a transit trade center for the goods arriving from India . . . mainly the Persian silk, cotton, narcotic medicine, felt of various colors, which crossed exclusively through Armenia".<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>A. Davrihzhets'i, *Patmut'wn*, pp.338-39.

<sup>36</sup>*ZhyE dari hayeren dzeragreri . . .*, p. CIX.

<sup>37</sup>*Simeon dpri Lehats'voy, Ughegrut'wn*, p. 469.

<sup>38</sup> Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un Voyage du Levant*, p. 262

The seventeenth century chronicler Hakob Karnetsi in his *Nkaragir verin Hayots'* (The Description of Upper Armenia) provides the following information about Erzerum: "Armenian merchants from all corners of the nation's habitation reside here. Throughout the whole year, they buy and sell, and earn their living by trading among other things, textiles, fabrics, silk, canvases, various kinds of precious stones, diamond, ruby, emerald, and cosmetic. Presently, this city is like Istanbul, and where the turnover is from ten to twenty thousand freights annually, generating ten thousand coins for the coffers of the pasha."<sup>39</sup>

Among the Western Armenian merchants, the *khojas* of Amid were also well known for their zeal and skill in the worldwide trade. Speaking about them, Simeon Lehats'i says that one thousand Armenian families lived in Amid. "... all of the wealthy and capable, enjoying respect and prestige, and possessed the qualities worthy of important positions. Both the mint and the customs were under their control."<sup>40</sup>

One of the most important midpoints on the Tabriz-Smyrna road was the city of Tokat. Jean Baptiste Tavernier describes Tokat as one of the major transit stations of the East. There "caravans came from Persia, Diarbekir, Baghdad, Constantinople, Smyrna, Sinop without interruption."<sup>41</sup>

Another major Western Armenian commercial center of the Levantine trade was Van. According to the Frenchman Rafael du Mans, "Lake Van's fish *tarekh* constituted one the major commercial items which was exported by Armenian merchants to Moscow, and other locations in Russia, Iran as well as Georgia. The entire East knew and spoke highly of this notable fish."<sup>42</sup>

In the Levantine markets, Armenia's colored leather (*safian*), dye, fabric, cotton, raw silk, etc, were popular items.

<sup>39</sup>*Manr zhamanakagrut'iwinner, 13-18-rd, dd. h. I, [Minor Chronicles, 13th-18th Centuries], (Erevan, 1951), vol. I, pp. 568-69.*

<sup>40</sup>*Simeon d'pri Lehats'voy, Ughegrut'awn, p. 205.*

<sup>41</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>42</sup>R. du Mans, *État de la Perse . . .*, p. 347.

The participation of Armenians in the Levantine trade was significant in the early seventeenth century because of the growing demand for silk in the European markets. The Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul, in a May 2, 1615 communiqué to his minister of foreign affairs, states that subsequent to the opening of the sea route leading to India, the trade of spices with the East ushered in a new era. On the contrary, silk supplanted it as the dominant item traded between the East and the West.<sup>43</sup> According to the German, Adam Oliarius, during the first half of the seventeenth century, close to twenty thousand bales of raw silk were collected in Iran.<sup>44</sup> The domestic consumption of this silk did not exceed one thousand bales, and the rest was exported to commercial centers of the Levant and Europe.

It is important to note that the Armenian merchants in Levant were, sooner or later, to be confronted with serious competitors. After the establishment of the regime of capitulation at the end of the sixteenth century, the penetration of the European trade capital in the Middle East was completed, and the Eastern market had become the battleground for the Western European mercantile countries, primarily, France, England, and Holland.

England, in the light of its political and commercial interests vis-a-vis France and Holland, made every effort to obtain a monopoly over Iran's silk trade, or as a last resort to disrupt the silk trade along the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Undoubtedly, England's policy was also directed at the Armenian merchants who conducted a significant part of their business with France and Holland. In general, the English merchants considered the Armenian merchants as their serious competitors.

In order to weaken their competitors, the English merchants resorted to several attacks. First, in 1592, they undertook the establishment of "The Levant Company", which was also referred to as "The Turkish Company". In order to purchase cheap raw silk, and obtain a monopoly over its export, the merchants of this company

<sup>43</sup>A. Ark'. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'iwn Halepi hayots'*, pp. 293-94, 302.

<sup>44</sup>*Podrobnnye opisaniye . . .*, p. 791.



tried persistently to penetrate the main silk producing regions of Iran. In 1607, they obtained a permit from the Ottoman Sultan to access the Black Sea, which was off limits to the Europeans. Then, in 1609, the English ambassador in Constantinople was authorized to sail the ship *Royal Defense* through the Bosphorus, and establish a commercial office in Trebizond from where the export of the Iranian silk could be arranged.<sup>45</sup>

In order to achieve its goals, the Levant Company portrayed itself as an advocate of the Turks. It even pressured its own government not to sign an agreement with Anthony Sherley against Turkey, the representative of Shah Abbas I who in 1599 had arrived in Europe to pursue that task.<sup>46</sup> In the light of these efforts, the Sherley Mission met with complete failure. These measures reached such a point, that, at the request of the merchants of this company, British Foreign Secretary Salisbury, during 1606-1607, appealed to the Duke of Tuscany not to use English ships during his campaigns against Turkey.<sup>47</sup> Thomas Sherley, the brother of Anthony Sherley who, due to his satire "Judgments about the Turks" had earned the reputation of being fiercely anti-Turk, was imprisoned in the Tower (of London) for "propaganda against friendly Turkey".

On the other hand, the English knew that the Armenian diplomatic agents of Shah Abbas I, on his instructions, had tried to strike an agreement between Iran and Europe against Turkey.<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly, due to this issue, the British made every effort to destroy the reputation of the Armenian merchants in the eyes of the Turkish government.

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<sup>45</sup> K. Knorr, *British Colonial Theories, 1570-1850*, (Toronto, 1944), p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> See Edward Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, (London, 1933).

<sup>47</sup> See *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1601-1617*, London, 1860-1930, No. 590, 1622-1624, #283, #404.

<sup>48</sup> See V. Baibourtian, *Iranahayeri masnaksutiuny irana-evropakan hakaturkakan dashingq steghtselu pordzerum (16-17 centuries)*



Despite the capitulation rights, which the English had obtained from the Sultan,<sup>49</sup> they gradually retreated from their positions in the Levant, to the benefit of their competitors, like the Dutch and French, and in the raw silk trade, the Armenians. This was mainly because the newly established English East India Company drove out the Levant merchants from the Eastern trade of luxury items and spice, because the profit generated by the East India Company was three times that of the Levant Company.<sup>50</sup> Thus, in 1604, sixty-four merchants from the Levant Company were transferred to the more profitable East India Company.<sup>51</sup>

Critical efforts were made to increase the level of competitiveness of the Levant Company. Even the fact that in 1617 the so-called English "Adventurous Merchants" company resigned its right to import goods from Europe to the Levant in favor of the "Levant Company" did not help the situation.<sup>52</sup>

For the English, naturally, it was not beneficial to obtain the raw silk through intermediaries, i.e., the Armenian merchants. Specifying this reality, Richard Steele, serving in the East India Company, wrote that in Aleppo the price of raw silk was higher by fifty per cent than the price in Iran.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the English made significant efforts to penetrate the Iranian market.

The rivalry between the English merchant class and Armenian khojas was not limited to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. During the entire century, the English attempted to seize the monopoly of the silk export from the Armenian merchants, and especially to restrict their exports to the Levant. However, that policy of Britain did not succeed mainly because East India Company could not organize the wholesale export of Iranian silk through the naval route

<sup>49</sup> See G. Noradounghian, *Recueil d'actes Internationaux de l'Empire Ottoman*, t. I. (Paris, 1897), p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Early English Tracts on Commerce*, pp. 129, 150.

<sup>51</sup> W. Scott, *The Constitution and Finance of English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies up to 1720*, vol. 2, (Cambridge, 1912), p. 91.

<sup>52</sup> M. Epstein, *The English Levant Company*, (London, 1908), p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> Ahmad Taj Bakhsh, *Iran dar zamani Safaviye*, (Tabriz, 1971), p. 196.

of the Persian Gulf. As in the past, the larger portion of the commodity was exported by the Armenian merchants mainly through the caravan routes of Turkey to the commercial centers of the Levant.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the 1616 agreement signed between Turkey and Iran, in Sarav, had a significant beneficial effect on the Levantine trade of the Armenian merchants. The treaty included a special article by which Iranian merchants were given permission to freely export raw silk and other goods through Turkey.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the peace treaty signed between Turkey and Iran in Zohab, in 1639, ushered in eighty years of peaceful development. The harassment of the Armenian merchants, confiscation of their goods, and imposition of illegal taxes were all significantly reduced. Encouraged by the fact that the entire Iranian trade would take place through Turkey, the Sultanate adopted measures to guarantee easier transportation means for such caravans.

A similar policy was being followed even during the Turkish-Iranian wars.<sup>56</sup> The Turks monitored the caravan routes vigilantly, not only because the Ottoman Empire sought to receive its portion of the profit solely from the Iranian raw silk trade, but also from the exchange of commodities taking place with Central Asia, India and China.<sup>57</sup>

One of the main reasons for the centuries of Turco-Iranian wars was the factor of huge trade profits, mainly from the silk trade, and the unwavering desire of the belligerents to gain control of the South Caucasian and Iranian silk producing regions. It is not accidental that in the Turco-Iranian peace treaties in which the Turks were the victors, there was, as a rule, an article regarding compulsory payments of silk in lieu of Iranian war reparations. It is true that in the treaties such reparations are mentioned as "gifts," but that did not change the

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<sup>54</sup>Pouillet, *Nouvelles relations du Levant*, partie, I, II, (Paris, 1668), pp.413-16. Sanson, *Voyage du Relation de l'état présent de Royaume de Perse*, (Paris, 1694), p. 157.

<sup>55</sup>Don Garcia Figueroa, *Ambassade de Perse*, (Paris, 1667), p. 189.

<sup>56</sup>G. Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia* . . . , p. 62.

<sup>57</sup>H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy: Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East*, (London, 1970), pp. 210-11.

real state of affairs. It is noteworthy that when Iran ceased to hand over the silk, it led immediately to a new, devastating Turco-Iranian war.<sup>58</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that during the Turco-Iranian wars, in order to deprive the adversary of the profits of the sale of silk, the Turks not only massacred the population of the silk producing regions, but also ruthlessly cut down the mulberry trees.<sup>59</sup>

In any event, the looting of merchant caravans remained a reality in the Ottoman Empire. In this regard, Tavernier writes that the "entire Turkey is full of bandits who roamed around in large groups and ambushed the Armenian merchants on the roads. If they encountered wealthy merchants, they looted them, and often deprived them of their lives".<sup>60</sup>

Generally, in the Ottoman Empire in the early Middle Ages, the looting of caravans was a customary phenomenon. This phenomenon did not undergo any fundamental change in the late Middle Ages. Very often provincial governors, coming to an agreement with the bandits, allowed them to loot the trade caravans on the condition that they split the booty.<sup>61</sup> Often, the governor-pashas themselves organized bandit groups whose regular looting brought them huge profits. Arakel Davrizhets'i reports that the rebellious Pashas, in specific *derebeys*, and *ayans*, ruthlessly looted the trade caravans crossing their borders. He cites, for example, the case of Pasha Abaza of Erzerum who deceitfully gathered a large number of caravans in the city and looted them.<sup>62</sup> Regarding the same Pasha, Grigor Daranaghts'i writes that after looting seven hundred merchants of Julfa, returning from Istanbul in 1624, he told them "I need these more than you do, go and earn anew."<sup>63</sup>

Robbery, banditry, looting, and pillaging reached such a scale in Asia Minor that the English traveler Parry named the entire territory

<sup>58</sup> *Türk sanayi ve tıvarat tarihinde Bursada ipekçilik Fahri Dalsar*, Calisma vekaleti Kurulunda, p. 151.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Herbert, *Relation du Voyage de Perse et des Indes Orientales*, (Paris, 1663), p. 125.

<sup>60</sup> J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, p. 78.

<sup>61</sup> Ricaut, *Histoire de l'Etat present de l'Empire Ottoman*, (Paris, 1670), p. 219.

<sup>62</sup> A. Davrizhets'i, *Patmut'wn*, p. 573.

<sup>63</sup> Gr. Daranaghts'i, *Zhamanakgrut'wn*, p. 223.

"the country of thieves," writing that "all the people in that area are prone to thievery."<sup>64</sup>

Such rapacious activity became widespread, especially during the revolt of the Jalalis in Asia Minor. Zakaria Agulets'i in his *Journal* writes that when he was in Tokat in 1656, he witnessed the brutalities and looting executed by the Jalalis. "Today Seyyed Ahmad Pasha came along with his 12,000 strong horsemen. He was a Jalali, and seized plenty of wealth in the city. A number of merchants secretly escaped, hoping not to be caught and pay the money demanded."<sup>65</sup>

Very often, the provincial Pashas, disobeying the laws and regulations set by the Sultan, arbitrarily changed measures and weights (i.e. standards) and on the pretext of introducing new ones, extorted huge sums from the merchants. They also forced the Christian and Jewish merchants in every city to pay the tax for infidels, *kharaj*, whereas that tax was to be paid only once a year.<sup>66</sup>

The Turkish authorities arbitrarily increased the already existing high customs duties. During the entire seventeenth century, the Dutch had to struggle against the arbitrary increase of taxes in Aleppo by the Turkish authorities.<sup>67</sup> The correspondence between the Dutch consul in Istanbul, and his government, reveals that he had received orders, on several occasions, to do everything possible to convince the Turkish government to reduce the high taxes on raw silk, "the very foundation and the spirit of the Eastern trade."<sup>68</sup> Similar situations prevailed in other Turkish cities too. In Tripoli, for example, besides the regular customs duties, foreign merchants had to pay various arbitrary taxes and fees to the Ottoman customs officials, local pashas and *begs*.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Edward Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and His Persian Adventure*, p. 155.

<sup>65</sup> Zak'aria Agulets'u *oragrut'iwne*, p. 47.

<sup>66</sup> Pouillet, *Nouvelles, relations . . .*, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> Z. Vaash, *Istoriia ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Gollandii v 16-18v.v.*, [History of Economic Development of Holland in the 16th-18th Centuries], (Moscow, 1949), p. 308.

<sup>68</sup> Zak'areay Sarkawagi *Patmagrut'wn*, pp. 311-12.

<sup>69</sup> Artavazd ark'. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'wn Halepi hayots*, pp. 304-07.

Zakaria Agulets'i says that in order to transport their goods from Agulis to Tokat, the Armenian merchants had to pay various customs fees (gomruk), and road taxes (*baj*) in Azat-Der, Nakhijevan, Sharur, Erevan, Etchmiadzin, Kaghzvan, Aghjaghala, Choban-Korpi, Hasanghala, Ilija and Tokat.<sup>70</sup>

Another seventeenth century chronicler, Kostand Jughayetsi, in his *Ashkharhazhoghov*, states that the merchants on the Aleppo-Tabriz main trade road had to pay various "khalj" and "balj" (taxes and fees) in Aleppo, Aintap, Jafargune, Urfa, Bitlis, Van, Datvan, Adiljevaz, Bandimahi, Noshar, Chors, and Marand.

However, the expenses of the merchants were *not limited only* to those mentioned above. The merchants were subjected to various types of extortion in Aleppo, Aintap, Malatia, Kamakh, Erzuka, Ilija, Erzerum, Hasanghala, Choban-Korpi, Kaghzvan, Erevan, Nakhijevan, Marand, and Tabriz. In addition to the legal taxes and fees, "voluntary" donations or "peshkesh" were demanded. These were given to the Ottoman officials in order to avoid petty obstacles and hindrances. Kostand Jughayets'i has listed these for the information of the Armenian merchants.<sup>71</sup>

The scribe Simeon Lehats'i, describing his expedition from Constantinople towards Mush, Kharberd and Amid, describes the general state of the country, "The houses are like stables, dark, and those in the cities are built with brick. The gates are small and narrow ... People, suffering and distressed, live under the oppressive Turks, in extreme poverty and misery, due to constant taxing. They were subject to taxes, fines, accusations, bribes, and kharaj, which were imposed on them. If one had ten children, they collected taxes for all of them. Even if one left the country, he was charged exit tax. In Istanbul, there was no trace of a horse, mule, and from there to Sevast (Sebastia) all the way to Amid, neither donkeys nor camels, and in Sevast, not even a domestic donkey was seen. All used oxen either for transport or to carry salt and other items ... In every city one

<sup>70</sup>Zak'aria Agulets'u *oragrutivne*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>71</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. No.8443, pp. 245a-47b.



had to pay taxes for horses, otherwise he would be subject to persecution. One had to pay if he was to keep his house and donkey. On several occasions they took away my donkey. I barely managed to unload my belongings. Thus, I was distraught under the fear and terror. Even if one traveled with a big caravan, he would still be subject to looting, pillage, persecution and harassment ..."<sup>72</sup>

In a memoir, written in Smyrna in 1697, the writer complains bitterly that "we face numerous hardships due to the multiplicity of taxes. Everything is under the hoof of the horses of the bandits. Not only the roads were their domain, where merchants sustained heavy losses, they roamed the cities and looted and pillaged without even sparing women and children."<sup>73</sup>

In general, while the Turkish Sultans were inclined favorably towards the Jewish and Greek merchants, they persecuted the Armenian merchants.

Undoubtedly, the outcome of all this would have been decline in the trade, and depopulation of cities, villages and towns lying on the trade routes. In this regard, we find much evidence. Thus, according to a memoir written in 1687 in Tokhat, "Paths and caravans were emptied. Roads were plundered. Many merchants were looted and killed ... They stripped the poor and the blind, openly robed people with no fear from anybody."<sup>74</sup>

The caravan traffic through the territory of the Ottoman Empire was also disrupted due to the almost uninterrupted Turco-Iranian wars. The caravans had to move extremely slowly, waiting for long periods for the cessation of a military operation; and often they were attacked by the belligerent armies.

All this made the khojas form caravans and organize their movements with great care. In this regard we come across interesting facts in Joachim Schroder's work, *Aramean lezvin gandz* (The Treasure of the Armenian Language). In a letter to an Armenian merchant, Safar,

<sup>72</sup>Handes Amsoreay, 1934, p. 159.

<sup>73</sup>M. Mashtots'i anwan Matenadaran, dzer. No.3280, p. 224b.

<sup>74</sup>M. Mashtots'i anwan Matenadaran, dzer. No.1149, pp. 295b, 296a.

by a French fellow traveler, a question is asked as to "how merchants make preparations for sending their goods in your vast and huge country heading towards India, Rumeli, Arabestan, and other countries, especially when in your country you do not have sea or navigation?"<sup>75</sup> The Armenian *khoja* answers: "Very easy. When there are many of them, and have plenty of goods, they form caravans. They have their caravan heads, and riflemen. They load their merchandise on camels and horses or mules. Horsemen form up like a big army. They strictly follow the instructions of the caravan head, where to set up camps, and carry their own food and water. Wherever they want they use tents and after fulfilling their needs, they move ahead."<sup>76</sup>

Every Armenian *khoja* was skilled in the use of arms, and in an extreme situation, was able to protect himself in an attack by a bandit group. Mateos Jughayets'i states that before leaving for any country, the Armenian merchants usually made major preparations. "Thus," he writes, "when intending to pass from a country to another they thought it over many times and only after that leave. They carried arms, and mounted troopers to encounter their enemies."<sup>77</sup>

To make their expeditions smooth, the Armenian merchants needed various types of maps and guidance. For that purpose, in 1685, the *Ashkharhazhghov* or *Vasn norahas mankants yev eritasard vacharakanats khrai*<sup>78</sup> was completed by Kostand Jughayets'i. This is a textbook for novice merchants. The book contains vast information about weights and measurement standards used in different countries as well as the adopted currency unit, etc. Without doubt, it constituted one of the best primary sources for seventeenth century international trade and the participation of the Armenian merchants in it. With the efforts of the scribe Kostand Jughayets'i, a school of commerce was opened in New Julfa, which during the period of its existence, produced more than two hundred-fifty graduates. In this school, the

<sup>75</sup>H. A. Schroder, *Aramean lezvin gandz*, p. 341.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 341.

<sup>77</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. No. 2229, p. 160b.

<sup>78</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. No. 8443.

future merchants studied, "arithmetic, reading, writing, and on the whole trade skills."<sup>79</sup>

In 1695, Tovma Vanandets'i published a map entitled *Hamatarats Ashkharhats'uyts'* (General Geography), which was supplemented by its commentary or the "key" (The Legend), in 1696. In fact, those works by Tovma Vanandets'i were intended for educational purposes in the prospective university in Armenia.

The Armenian merchants crisscrossing Europe, Asia, and Africa, had pragmatic personalities, unique to their profession. They kept diaries (*davtar*) during their travels, they entered details in which associated with the various places they visited, i.e. the trade routes, measures, weights, and types of taxes collected from the merchants, etc. These were presumably used by their fellow *khojas* as guides. Thus, an Armenian merchant involved in intercontinental trade, named Zakaria Agulets'i, has left such a diary of amazing accuracy and reliability. He writes: "I did not write this diary during one trip. Leaving Agulis in 1646, I spent the next years until 1667 traveling, drafted it with appropriate items. The information in the third and fourth books is partly accurate, partly not. In 1667, with God's blessing, after necessary corrections, I produced this notebook. Myself, unworthy Zakaria, wherever I have been I wrote according the following principle. If I did not see personally cities or sea, and land, I did not write anything. However, wherever I visited and saw, I wrote, and whatever, I did not see, did not mention."<sup>80</sup>

The French traveler Tournefort writes: "These Armenians, either running their own business or serving Julfa merchants, are hard working and unwary at the time of their trips, and disregard unfavorable weather conditions. We have seen many, among them the wealthiest, who crossed the river by foot submerged in the water up to their necks, in order to save their and their friends bales . . . These honest and noble people never change their behavior. They

<sup>79</sup>H.Ter-Hovhaneants, *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, p. 253.

<sup>80</sup>Zak'aria Agulets'u *oragrut'iwne*, p. 6.



are always the same, avoid rowdy foreigners and respect those who are calm and peaceful: graciously provide shelter and feed them . . . Whenever they learn of the passing of a caravan, they travel a distance of one to two days to welcome their compatriots with wine and beverages."<sup>81</sup>

It is no wonder that Scharer, a prominent expert on the history of international trade in the seventeenth century, qualifies the Armenian merchants as "bold," "entrepreneurial," and accustomed to adventures and hardships."<sup>82</sup>

Thus, patience, diligence, persistence and a disregard for hardships in attaining their goals constitute the unique characteristic of the Armenian *khojas*.<sup>83</sup>

As mentioned above, after the signing of the Turco-Iranian treaty of 1639, the participation of Iranian-Armenian merchants in the Levantine trade gained new momentum. Likewise, the representatives of the Western Armenian capital also activated their operations. In the cities of Aleppo, Alexandretta, Smyrna, Tripoli, Istanbul, etc the Armenian merchants expanded trade on an unprecedented scale. The English commercial representative in Istanbul had to confess that in the cities where the foundations of the English trade were quite firm, the raw silk trade was predominantly in the hands of the Armenian merchants.

Of course, the trade of the Armenian merchants with the Levant was not limited to raw silk and silk textiles. They imported into the Levant trade centers a variety of Eastern goods e.g., spices, precious stones, leather products, goat and camel wool, botanical dyes, (al, indigo, etc), rugs, coffee, furs, medicinal herbs, narcotic medicine, saffron, pepper, carnation, Muscat nut, indigo, mercury, earthenware, sulfur, rice, tobacco, nuts, raisins, dried fruits, opium, marble, wine (of special value was the Hormuz wine) ceramic and copper tableware,

<sup>81</sup>Hovhannes Art'inean, "Nor Jughayets'i hayerun arewture ZhE darun," [The Trade of New Julfa Armenians in the 17th Century], *Anahit*, 1908, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup>Scharer, *Histoire du Commerce de tous les Nations*, (Paris, 1857), t. 2, p. 621.

<sup>83</sup>Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, 5-rd hator, [Collection of Works], (Erevan, 1986), vol. V, p. 153.

rhubarb, *sakamon*, *kazban*, gum, gull-nut, crocus, cotton, camels, short-horn animals, etc. From the Levant, they exported to the East felt, coarse cloth, velvet, Venetian textiles, mirrors, glasses, eyeglasses, coral, amber, watches, Dutch and English drapes, gold and silver thread brocades, velvet garments, rifles, and various other goods.<sup>84</sup> The main customers of the products exported from the Levant by the Armenian merchants were the French, Dutch and Italian cities and city-states (e.g., Venice, Genoa, Livorno, Lucca, Ferrara, Piacenza).

Since the late sixteenth century, with the establishment of capitulations, the Levant had turned into a "battleground" between the major Western powers, France, England, and Holland. From the early seventeenth century, an irreconcilable commercial war broke out among them, which reached its climax during the second half of the century.<sup>85</sup>

Under these circumstances, the Armenian merchants had to manifest great flexibility in order to maintain their position in the Levantine trade. Here the Armenians were closely linked with the Venetian Republic.

This affinity arose because Venice, unable to withstand the commercial competition with the advanced manufacturing countries, had to encourage in every way possible the mediation of the Easterners, among them the Armenian merchants. With that purpose in mind, Venice granted several rights and privileges to the Armenians by periodically reducing their taxes.<sup>86</sup> Thus, thanks to the Armenian merchants, the Venetians could successfully compete with the commercial capital of England, Holland, France and other European states.

In the sphere of silk manufacturing in the first decade of the seventeenth century, the Venetian republic still occupied one of the leading positions.<sup>87</sup> Its silk production factories worked on the high

<sup>84</sup>G. Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia ...*, p. 122.

<sup>85</sup>M. Herbette, *Une Ambassade Persane sous Louis XIV, d'après des documents inédites*, (Paris, 1907), pp. 234-35.

<sup>86</sup>G. Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia ...*, p. 67.

<sup>87</sup>*Ocherki istorii Italii* [Sketches of the Italian History], (Moscow, 1959), p. 154.

quality raw Iranian silk. Located close to the vital centers of the West and Near East, Venice engaged in intermediary trade between them. As a result, the Republic of Venice had numerous consulates specializing in commercial activities, with which Armenian merchants maintained large mercantile operations. The Venetian merchants in the Near East countries interacted closely with the local, particularly the Armenian merchants and through them with the ruling feudal classes of those countries.

The expansion of commodity exchange with the Armenian merchants became important for Venice during the second half of the seventeenth century, when, at the instigation of the French diplomats, Turkey severed its relations with Venice, even depriving it of all trade privileges.<sup>88</sup> That was the outcome of the ongoing quarter-century (1645-1669) war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire over Crete, which simultaneously touched the trade policies of the two countries.

The Armenian merchants in the Levant also conducted large-scale trade with Holland, which in the mid-seventeenth century had reached the zenith of its commercial might. At that time, the Netherlanders had become one of the main suppliers of goods to the Levant from the Central and Northern European markets.<sup>89</sup> In a fierce struggle against its competitors, Holland gradually expanded its trade in the Levant, relying on the 1598 capitulation treaty signed with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>90</sup> The Dutch, according to the 1598 Sultanate *firman* (decree), were granted the right to conduct trade under either French or English flags. However, they preferred to establish direct contact with the countries of the Near East, and sell their goods unhindered and without the use of flags. Consequently, the Netherlanders, like the French and the English, needed to sign a commercial and political treaty with the Sublime Porte, especially as they hoped that the signing of such a friendship treaty would save their ships from attacks by Turkish pirates. In 1611, the famous Dutch jurist and diplomat, Cornelius

<sup>88</sup>N. A. Smirnov, "Rossiia i Turts'liia v 16-17v.v.," T. 1 [Russia and Turkey in the 16th-17th Centuries], *Uchoenie zapiski*, vep. 94, (Moscow, 1946), vol. 1, p. 64.

<sup>89</sup>H. Castries, *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*, T. 3, (Paris, 1912), p. 40.

<sup>90</sup>J. de Hammer, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours*, t. 2, (Paris, 1844), p. 348.

Haga, was sent to Constantinople as 'the plenipotentiary of the Netherlands for this purpose. On July 6, 1612, political-commercial treaty was signed between the union of Dutch provinces and the Sublime Porte, which also contained capitulation provisions. The Dutch were granted rights similar to those of the French and the English, and the Dutch merchants were entitled to free entry and the privilege of conducting trade in all corners of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, Dutch ships were granted permission to navigate in Turkish waters under their own flag. Following the signing of this treaty, Dutch merchants quickly established trade houses throughout the Ottoman Empire.

In 1617, the Dutch military fleet appeared in the Mediterranean Sea. It was the only naval fleet of a state which was not located in the Mediterranean basin.<sup>91</sup> The English ambassador pleaded with the Sultan to "assist old friend, instead of searching for new ones" but without success. The close cooperation between Holland and the Ottoman Empire led the Venetian diplomats to speculate that there was a secret treaty between Holland and Turkey aimed at a joint struggle against Spain.

Until the establishment of trade relations between Iran and Holland (1623), trade between the two countries was conducted mainly through the Armenian merchants in the Levantine cities as well as in Holland. The Armenians were familiar with Amsterdam since 1560.<sup>92</sup> Just a century later, in 1660, there were 60 Armenian trading houses in Amsterdam alone.<sup>93</sup>

After receiving a capitulation in 1612, the Netherlands established active maritime operations between their ports and Ottoman Turkey's trade centers where they disembarked their manufactured products, and purchased Eastern goods, primarily raw silk, and wool in large

<sup>91</sup>P. Pringle, *Jolly Roger*, (New York, 1953), p. 55.

<sup>92</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Hollandian ew hayere ZhZ-ZhY' darerum*, [Holland and the Armenians in the 16th-18th Centuries], (Vienna, 1926), p. 14.

<sup>93</sup>Fr. Macler, *Quatre Conférences sur l'Arménie et les Arméniens Faites en Hollande*, (Paris, 1932), p. 251.

quantities.<sup>94</sup> Specifically in this period, the Dutch also started to use the services of the Armenian and Greek merchants<sup>95</sup> who were involved in the domestic and foreign trade of Turkey. In 1623, the Dutch East India Company received a decree from Shah Abbas I allowing them to conduct trade in Iran. The cooperation between the Armenians and the Dutch, thus, encompassed even broader dimensions.<sup>96</sup>

In 1625, a special institution named, "Near Eastern Trade and Mediterranean Sea Maritime Authority," was established in Amsterdam. The purpose of this institution was to oversee the international relations shaping up in the Mediterranean Sea, and implement the trade policy with the countries of the Near East.<sup>97</sup>

By this time, specially in the 1630s, in the seaports of the Levant, the trade between the Dutch and Armenian merchants was flourishing, especially because the Holstein Company refused to import Iranian silk into Europe through Russia due to the heavy duties imposed by the Russian authorities.<sup>98</sup>

In the Levant, the Dutch maintained extensive contacts with the Armenian merchants of Iran and Turkey, in particular in the cities of Smyrna, Constantinople, and Aleppo. Over thirty Dutch ships from Amsterdam annually visited Smyrna and other Levantine seaports. Still in a weak position, the Dutch were also inclined to cooperate with the local merchants against their competitors, the English and French.

The expanding trade of the Levantine merchants in the second half of the seventeenth century was beginning to be viewed by the Dutch as trade competition for which they had to adopt various counter measures. Thus, the Dutch consul in Smyrna, Michael Mortier,

<sup>94</sup>H. Watjen, *Die Niederländer im Mittelmeergebiet zur Zeit ihrer höchsten Machtstellung* Abhande Z. Verkehrs und Seegeschichte, Bd., II, (Berlin, 1909), pp. 134, 136.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>96</sup>H. Dunlop, *Source pour servir a l'histoire de la compagnie des Indes Orientales et La Hay*, 1930, p. 74.

<sup>97</sup>Fr. Macler, *Quatre Conférences sur l'Arménie* . . . , p. 14.

<sup>98</sup>N. G. Kukanova, *Ocherki po istorii russko-iranskikh torgovikh otnoshenii v 17 - pervoi polovine 19 v.*, [Sketches on the History of Russo-Iranian Trade Relations in the 17th -first half of the 19th Century, (Saransk, 1977), p. 71.



attempted to limit the trade of the Armenian and Greek merchants with Europe. In 1658, a protest note by the Armenian merchants was presented to the government of the Netherlands in which they complained about the difficulties which the Dutch consul had created to hinder and sabotage their trade. Also, the consul increased the consular taxes, confiscated the goods of the Armenian merchants, etc. In the same document, the Armenians complained that the consul did not treat them like merchants but rather like "Turks" and requested that he be replaced.<sup>99</sup> The Dutch community of Smyrna also, intervened in the matter. On February 14, 1658, an extensive report was sent to Amsterdam in which the Dutch community members cautioned that if the local consul were not replaced, the unhappy Armenian, Greek, and Jewish merchants would no longer sell their goods to the Dutch.<sup>100</sup> Eventually, in 1660, the government of the Netherlands relieved the consul from his post and replaced him with one Ducca di Giovanni.

In order to struggle against their competitors and to strengthen their own maritime activities, the Netherlanders adopted a new law according to which the transportation of goods from Iran and Turkey to Holland by foreign ships was prohibited. Many merchants who imported and exported their goods to and from Holland by foreign ships were faced with the loss of markets in Amsterdam. This situation was especially true in the case of those Armenian merchants who resided in, or used, Smyrna as their point of export. Therefore, they either had to leave the Levant and establish themselves in Amsterdam or open their commercial branches there and continue their trade with Dutch ships or Armenian ships under the Dutch flag. From that time on, the Armenians who had established permanent settlements in Amsterdam began to play a prominent role in the Dutch trade with the Near East.<sup>101</sup>

The Armenian merchants in the Levant also had extensive trade links with France. The Mediterranean Sea traditionally occupied an

<sup>99</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew . . .*, pp. 15-31.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

important place in the French foreign policy, and trade with the Levant was vitally important to France.<sup>102</sup>

France obtained its first capitulation rights from the Ottoman Empire in 1535, during the reign of King Francis I. This was embodied in a commercial agreement, which facilitated the penetration of the French merchants in the Near East, and provided them broad opportunities for conducting business with the Levant. In 1581, France received a new capitulation by which the Venetian, Genoese, English and Spanish ships and those belonging to a number of other European countries could enter the Levantine seaports only under the French flag.<sup>103</sup>

French absolutism in the seventeenth century encouraged its merchants' trade with the Levant even more. King Louis XIII's chief Minister Cardinal Richelieu created the post of state secretary for Levantine affairs. In the 1630s, from Marseilles alone, which constituted the Eastern maritime gate of France, annually seventy ships departed for the Levant.<sup>104</sup> In order to expand the Levantine trade, the Comptroller General of Finance, Jean Baptist Colbert, established a special fifteen-million livre trade company, whose members were famous French executives. King Louis XIV granted broad rights to this company. He also instructed all French consulates and chambers of commerce, spread throughout the coastal cities of the Levant, the Black Sea, and the Persian Gulf, to assist and support this Levantine Company.<sup>105</sup>

However, despite these broad privileges and monopolies, the company was for some time unable to expand its operations, not only because of the presence of France's competitors in the Levant, but also because of the resistance of the Turkish government. It is no

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<sup>102</sup>Gay de Montanella R., *Valoracion hispanica en el Mediterraneo*, (Marscile, 1952), p. 118.

<sup>103</sup>Ch. Perigot, *Histoire du Commerce Français*, (Paris, 1884) pp. 149-51.

<sup>104</sup>G. Tongas, *Les relations de la France avec l'Empire Ottoman durant la première moitié du XVII siècle*, (Toulouse, 1942), p. 199.

<sup>105</sup>108 P. Masson, *Histoire du Commerce Français dans le Levant au XVII-e siècle*, (Paris, 1895), pp. 183-84.

coincidence that Istanbul decisively rejected France's request for the signing of a new capitulation agreement. In this period, the Ottomans adopted a moderate policy toward the European powers, including France, mainly because those powers had initiated an active foreign policy towards the Near East. In response, beginning in 1645, Turkey uninterruptedly conducted a series of wars against them. The European rulers felt obligated to form the "Holy League" which included Austria, Poland, and Venice. Later in the same year, Russia also joined the League.<sup>106</sup>

In the meantime, the Sultan learned that in 1663, the famous French Marshall Turenne had come up with a plan in which he called on King Louis XIV to begin a campaign against the Turkish Sultan. Franco-Turkish relations intensified, especially in 1670 when Louis XIV sent Marquis Nuantel to his new assignment as ambassador to Ottoman Turkey. He arrived on board a warship along with a whole fleet, which temporarily threatened a new trade war.<sup>107</sup> The young French king was extremely excited by the illusion of being a crusader. Many in his circle were encouraging him. For example, the famous court poet Buallot, in a piece dedicated to the "sun king" wrote "I will be expecting you in six months on the shores of the Hellespont."<sup>108</sup>

The behavior of the Sultan towards the French was also explained by the fact that the latter had assisted the Venetians during the war of Candia. The Grand Vizier, Koprulu Ahmed, had told the French ambassador in this regard, "We know that you are our friends, but everywhere we encounter you with our enemies."<sup>109</sup>

All these developments, to some extent hindered French commercial operations, but were unable to halt them, because the French and the Ottoman Empire as well as the local merchants in the trade all had vested interests.

<sup>106</sup>J. W. Zinkeisen, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*, B, V. Gotha, 1856, p. 87.

<sup>107</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital*, pp. 109-11.

<sup>108</sup>Théophile Lavallée, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman*, (Paris, 1855), p. 321.

<sup>109</sup>Comte de Saint-Priest, *Memoire sur l'Ambassade de France en Turquie*, (Paris, 1877), p. 229.



It is important to note that the Levant was also a major center for Iranian-French trade. Until 1664, there were practically no direct trade relations between France and Iran. Although from the beginning of the century a few attempts were made towards the establishment of direct economic and political ties between the two nations, they had remained fruitless. Thus, in 1610, during the reign of Shah Abbas I, the first Iranian delegation headed by Fr. Juste, a member of the Catholic Capuchin Order, departed for France. He arrived in Paris three months after the death of Henry IV. The court declared that the Shah was required to send a new delegation to the successor king. But that never materialized.<sup>110</sup>

In 1627, Cardinal Richelieu sent a delegation to Iran. It was assigned the task of obtaining permission from Shah Abbas I to open a Capuchin mission in Isfahan. The Shah consented to this. Much later, in 1653, the French opened a Jesuit mission in New Julfa headed by Fr. Francios Rigourdi.<sup>111</sup>

Thus, unable to establish direct commercial-economic ties with Iran for a considerable period of time, France, the major importer of Iranian raw silk, obtained it from the Levant and almost exclusively from the Armenian merchants. However, Armenian trade with Marseilles was not limited only to the raw silk trade. The Armenians imported to, and exported from, that city various goods, which were traded also by the French merchants. Consequently, the Armenian merchants emerged as the competitors of the French. The seriousness of that competition becomes evident from the following document. Based on the complaints filed with the Marseilles Palace of Commerce, the city hall on December 10, 1622, issued an order that captains of French ships were strictly prohibited from transporting goods belonging to Armenian merchants from the Levant to Marseilles, and vice versa. Any captain violating the order would be fined ten thousand

<sup>110</sup>A. Alpojayean, *Patmut'iwn hay gagh't'akanut'ean*, p. 173.

<sup>111</sup>Roger Savori, *Iran under the Safavids*, (Cambridge, 1980), p. 120.

gold coins. The authorities of Provence and Toulon also issued similar orders.<sup>112</sup>

The closing of the French seaports was a heavy blow to the Armenian merchants, and the Armenian *khojas* of Julfa mobilized their resources to resolve the situation. In 1628, Khoja Nazar, the mayor ("kalantar") of New Julfa, organized a meeting between Fr. Pacific, a member of the French branch of the Capuchin Order, and Shah Abbas I. In return for his mediation, Fr. Pacific requested permission to organize a Capuchin missionary station in Isfahan.<sup>113</sup> Having received that permission, the French cleric delivered on his promise. On November 23, 1629, a special permit was issued by Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu, which granted Armenian merchants free access to Marseilles.<sup>114</sup> However, this situation did not last long. Between 1634 and 1650, the Marseilles authorities again restricted the Armenian merchants' trade by assigning a fifty per cent customs tax on their goods.<sup>115</sup> In fact, these measures of the French authorities were directed not only at the Armenian merchants, but also against their main competitor in the Levant trade, the Dutch, since the latter also purchased large quantities of Eastern goods from the Armenian merchants in Marseilles.

After the establishment of the French East India Company, King Louis XIV sent a mission to Iran, which arrived in Isfahan in November 1665. The Shah granted the French all the rights and privileges enjoyed by the English and the Dutch.<sup>116</sup> However, this agreement did not really grant anything in specific to the French, except satisfaction from the point of view of the self-esteem of the leading European state. Basically, France could not enter the maritime trade as a competitor to the English or the Dutch. And, as regards the land

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<sup>112</sup>Fr. Macler, "Notes de manuscrits arméniens ou relatifs aux Arméniens, vus dans quelques bibliothèques de la péninsule ibérique et du sud-est de la France," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, t. II, Paris, 1922.

<sup>113</sup>P. Pacifique, *Relation du voyage en Perse*, (Lille, 1632), t. II, p. 423.

<sup>114</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 456.

<sup>115</sup>See H. Samuelian, "Les Arméniens, en France depuis les origines, jusqu'à nos jours," *Le Foyer*, III-ème année, No.35, 1er Avril (Paris, 1930).

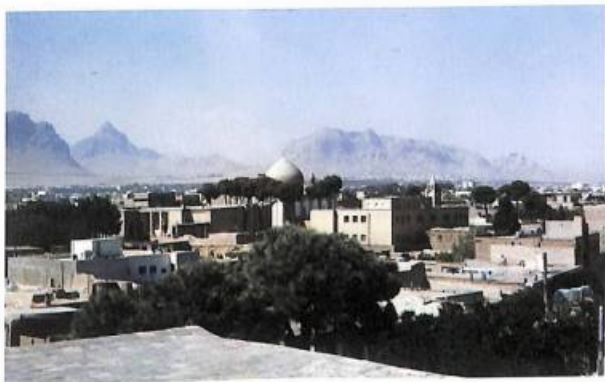
<sup>116</sup>Roger Savori, *Iran under the Safavids*, p. 120.



Margar Shahrmanian, well-known Armenian merchant from New Julfa



The Surb Astvatsatsin Church of New Julfa



The distant view of New Julfa



The Armenian Cathedral at All Saviour's Monastery of New Julfa



Interior view of the dome of All Saviour's Cathedral of New Julfa

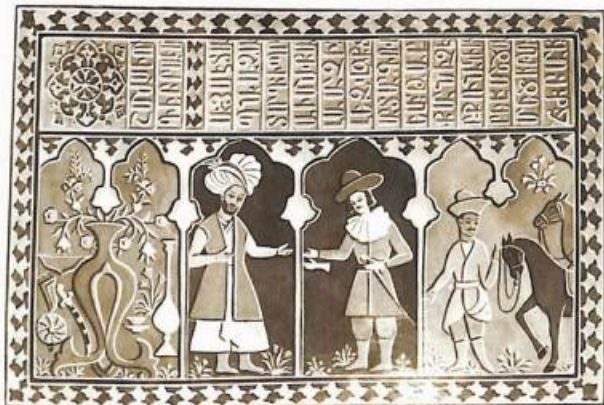




Tombstone of New Julfa Armenian merchant,  
Frangyul Aghazar Topchian, a ship owner



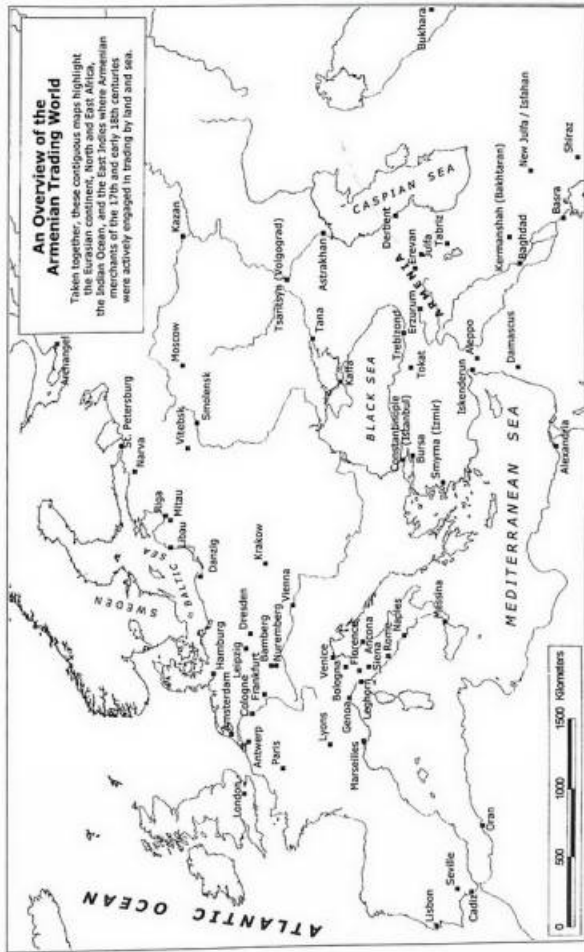
Tombstone of New Julfa merchant, Marut



Armenian khoja and European merchant, reproduced  
by late Abraham Gurgonian

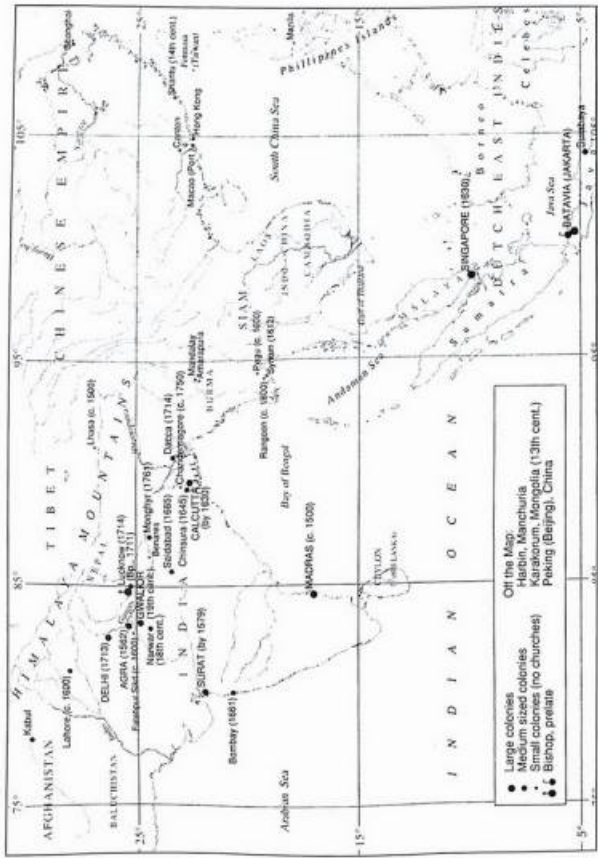


"Khoja's bridge", connecting New Julfa with Isfahan  
(Seventeenth Century)



From *Armenian Merchants of the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: English East India Company Sources*, Edited by Vahe Baladouni and Margaret Makepeace, published by American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1998.





The Armenian Merchant Communities in South and Southeast Asia, from Armenia: A Historical Atlas by Robert H. Hewsen, published by The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001.

caravan trade, the French merchants were not generally engaged in that. Therefore, the earlier cooperation between the French bourgeoisie and Armenian merchants remained in force.

It is important to note that the Armenian merchants in the Levant preferred to sell their goods to the French who paid cash for them, whereas the Dutch and English paid half the price of the silk in woolen clothing.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup>Hovh. Art'inean, "Nor Jughayets'i hayerun arewture ZhE darun," *Anahit*, 1908, p. 175.

## The Mediterranean Trade Route and the Armenian Merchants' Trade with Western European Countries

In the Middle Ages, the economic revival of the Mediterranean countries had a direct impact on "Maritime Armenia" or the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia which was already incorporated in the international trade, as mentioned earlier. Cilicia had established extensive ties with various European countries.<sup>1</sup> The first crowned ruler of the kingdom, Levon II (1198-1219), in particular, had signed trade agreements with the city states of Venice and Genoa in 1201. This allowed their merchants' free movement in Cilician Armenia; they were allowed to settle wherever they desired and construct houses of worship, etc. Similar rights and privileges were also granted to the Armenian merchants in Italian cities. This agreement also empowered the Italian merchants to conduct trade through Cilicia with the entire East.<sup>2</sup>

As an outcome of the new commercial relationship, evolved against the background of favorable conditions stipulated by the agreements, the maritime trade between Italy and Cilician Armenia increased in unprecedented proportions, as early as at the outset of the thirteenth century. The Cilician Armenian trade with the European countries

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<sup>1</sup>V. Langlois, *Le trésor des chartes d'Arménie*, (Venise, 1863), p.107.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

received a boost after 1261 when the Cilician King Hetum, in a special decree, granted distinct rights to European commercial institutions. Cilician Armenia became a busy outpost of Western commerce in the Levant, its strategic importance being enhanced by the fall of Acre to the Muslims in 1291. In this period, the Mediterranean trade prospered to such an extent that is often referred to as the "commercial revolution."<sup>3</sup>

Some historians believe that the prosperity of the Cilician Kingdom and its political and military might could be attributed to the fact that the main and the most convenient international trade route and caravan road to the East passed through the Cilician territory.

The seaports of Ayas, Korikos, Tarsus, Mamistra (Msis), as well as the city of Sis became major centers of transit trade. Italian merchants established communities and trading houses in these cities.

The commercial activity of the Cilician Armenian merchants was not limited to the Italian cities. The merchants often visited Belgium,<sup>4</sup> Spain,<sup>5</sup> the French seaport cities of Provence, Marseilles, Montfille, Narbon, Nim,<sup>6</sup> and also Holland, the Hanseatic League, and other European countries and states.

The Cilician Armenian merchants maintained their important position in the international trade until the collapse of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1375), when large-scale migrations of Cilician Armenians took place toward the West. In his 1226 memoir, written in Rome, Tadeos the scribe describes all the horrors which forced the unfortunate people to abandon their fatherland for foreign shores. He writes: "Our world (country) underwent indescribable sufferings that we witnessed with our own eyes. Only God knows how many

<sup>3</sup>R. S. Lopez, *Medieval Trade in the Mediterranean World*, (New York, 1955), pp. 50-156. Also, P. M. Montaves, *Islam i khristianstvo v ekonomike Sredizemnomoriya pozdnego srednevekovia* [Islam and Christianity in the Economy of the Mediterranean of the Late Medieval Ages], Paper presented at the 13th Congress of Historical Sciences, (Moscow, 1970), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Belgian ew hayere*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>5</sup>A. Alpayajean, *Patmut'wn hay gagh't'akanut'ean* [History of Armenian Migration], vol. II, (Cairo, 1955), pp. 626-27.

<sup>6</sup>Hrant Armen, *Fransahay taregirk'*, [French Armenian Chronicle] 1927, p. 54.

were put to the sword, taken as prisoners, and afterwards death, severe famine we have been subject to."<sup>7</sup>

Subsequent to the fall of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, thousands of Armenians moved "overseas," that is, to Cyprus, and from there to Italy, and dispersed to various cities. Similar mass migrations also took place in 1402, 1404, and 1423-1424. In this regard, Maghakia the scribe chronicler provides the following information: "In the year AD 1402, after the fall of the Armenian kingdom of Sis, the king's family, princes, and the nobility embarked on ships and left for Europe. Many tombs in Ancona with Armenian inscriptions have survived to this day, which is AD 1701."<sup>8</sup>

As a result of these developments, large and small Armenian communities were established in Rome, Venice, Pisa, Genoa, Rimini, Florence, Perugia, Ancona, Sicily, Milan, Bologna, Naples, Lucca, and other cities and regions of Italy.

In the early stages of their establishment, the Catholic Church demonstrated a tolerant behavior towards the Armenians who had settled in Italy. The Armenians were allowed to conduct their worship according to Illuminator's rites, and build monasteries, churches, etc. However, subsequent to the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, the Vatican reversed its policy, and sought forcible proselytization to Catholicism. As a result, the Armenian population was subjected to assimilation and gradually disappeared.

The additional reason for the decline and disappearance of the Armenian communities in Italy was the lack of regular contact among them. This was mainly due to the fact that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Italy itself was not a centralized, united state.

Even following the fall of the Armenian statehood of Cilicia, the Armenian merchants did not stop playing a significant role in international trade. Adapting to the new conditions, they continued to participate in East-West merchandise exchange. However, since

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<sup>7</sup>G. Hovsep'ean, *Hishatakarank'*, pp. 845-46.

<sup>8</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 453.

the major junctions of the Trans-Asian trade were under the control of the Italian merchants, who did not allow any local competition, the Armenian merchants gradually established themselves in the Crimea.

As was earlier mentioned, until 1475, that is, the occupation of the Crimea by the Ottoman Turks, the Crimean Armenian merchants conducting their trade on the land caravan routes between the Levant and the East, had no competitors.

Since the mid-fifteenth century, international trade gained an unprecedented domestic boost. While the main focus of the medieval trade was on the satisfaction of the needs of the upper class, and comprised mainly luxury items, since the mid-fifteenth century, the foundations of the so-called "contemporary" style of international trade were laid. The latter was mainly the outcome of the rapid growth of the European economy. In the West, crafts and the agricultural economy had already entered the mass production phase, which despite the rapidly growing population at that time, provided larger quantities of commodities for the people's consumption. The developing European industry naturally needed more and more raw materials, a significant portion of which was provided by the imports of raw silk, cotton, botanical dyes, plant gums, and various kinds of raw materials from the East. Besides, the growth of a capitalist society in Europe required the securing of permanent foreign markets for exports.

These factors formed the basis of an aggressive overseas policy of the countries concerned.

The booming ship-building industry in the sixteenth century contributed to the growth and strengthening of the ties between the Middle Eastern and European seaports, and subsequently, the large-scale transportation of cargo.

This period coincides with the rise of the Armenian merchant *khoja* class. Already in the sixteenth century, the Levant-East trade seemed extremely limited for them and they were beginning to seek



wider markets in the West than the Eastern seaports of the Mediterranean could secure. On the other hand, the continuous and bloody Turco-Iranian wars, most of which took place on the territory of Armenia proper, had created insecure conditions for life and property. Therefore, thousands of Armenians, among them mainly the representatives of the wealthy merchant classes, were forced to leave their fatherland and migrate to the European countries in search of a secure and free arena, and to breathe new life in the fading Armenian communities there. As a result of these emigration waves, Armenia was emptied of its entrepreneurial population. That situation is magnificently described in the following lines.

They left their homeland for abroad,  
In search of profitable trade,  
To Venice and Genoa,  
To the regions and borderlands of  
Trieste and Adriatic.  
They ruled the seas,  
The city of Ancona in Liguria.  
Flock and flock of wanderers,  
Ten thousand rambled here, ten thousand there.  
Armenia was ruined,  
And my Torgom and Askenaz among them were dwindled.<sup>9</sup>

The Frenchman Tournefort, describing this phenomenon, writes: "They [Armenian merchants] come from the interiors of Persia and establish themselves in Livorno. Not so early they settled in Marseilles. Who knows how many of them are settled in Holland, and England."<sup>10</sup>

Reviving the traditions of the Armenian maritime trade of the Middle Ages, the merchants *khojas* loaded their goods on European ships, crossed the Mediterranean Sea and brought to Europe the Eastern goods (Iranian, Turkish, Central Asian, Indian, Chinese, etc),

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<sup>9</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iw'n hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean ew shinut'ean ekeghets'woy nots'a i Liwornioy k'aghaki*, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup>Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage ...*, p. 158.

rich in variety and quality<sup>11</sup>. Among these the Persian raw silk was considered the best and its demand increased substantially due to the significant growth of the silk-weaving industry in Europe.

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, parallel with the development of trade in the Mediterranean basin, the number of Armenian ship-owners also increased. Ghevond Alishan, for example, mentions the names of a number of Venetian Armenian ship-owners: Zand, whose ship was called *Spirito Santo* (Holy Spirit), Shahumians and Nurikians whose ships were called *Sourb Khach* (Holy Cross) and *Tiramayr Shnorhats* (Madonna della Grazia), Aslan Poghos, owner of the ship *S. Hovsep* (St. Joseph), Petros Sinan, owner of the ship *Calera S. Giorgio*, Arakel Gerakian whose ship was called *Tiramayr Khaghghaser* (Madonna della Pace), etc.<sup>12</sup>

The names of some Iranian-Armenians, mostly New Julfa Armenian ship-owners, engaged in the trade between the Levant and Holland are also available to us. These are Coopman Van Armenien (merchant from Armenia), Coopman van Persien (merchant from Persia).

Naturally, the number of ships at the disposal of the Armenian merchants were not sufficient for all the transportation needs. Therefore, the Armenians had to use the shipping services of the European powers' fleets, primarily those of England, France and Holland, especially when that could guarantee reliable and safe transport of their goods. It has to be remembered that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, piracy was inseparable from maritime trade. Sea piracy had reached unprecedented dimensions, especially in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>13</sup> It is no coincidence that piracy was then called the "scourge of the Mediterranean trade." The North African pirate republics themselves had a fleet of one hundred and fifty ships, one thousand canons, and twenty thousand sailors.<sup>14</sup> All the states in

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<sup>11</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Hay-Venet.*, pp.503-04.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>G. Clark, "The Barbary Corsairs in the 17 Century," *Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. 8, no.1 (1944), p. 26.



the Mediterranean engaged in sea piracy. Even Cardinal Richelieu had ordered the commander of the French naval fleet, de Sardee, to capture the ships of all nations. As far as Turkey was concerned, the naval fleet of the Sultanate engaged in sea piracy as well. According to contemporaries, between 1609-1621, the European merchants lost more than one thousand and five hundred ships to piracy.<sup>15</sup>

There is no doubt that the Armenian merchants, deprived of national statehood and the support of their own government, were the victims of sea piracy more often. The Diary of Zakaria Agulets'i reveals that the trips of the Armenian khojas to Europe without a convoy of the naval fleet faced tremendous difficulties and often fell prey to the attacks of pirates.<sup>16</sup>

Available to us is some more similar data. Thus, the French pirate Henri d'Angliur de Bourlemon in 1649 confiscated *Merchande Armeno* (Merchant of Armenia), a ship belonging to the Armenian ship-owner Anton Poghos.<sup>17</sup> As a result of such attacks, not only individual merchants, but also entire trading houses became bankrupt.

To avoid such danger, the Armenian ship-owners rented warships from the European countries to escort their ships. There is evidence regarding the frequent use of the services of Dutch warships by the Armenian merchants. In the Mediterranean, sources refer especially to the services of the Dutch warship Gelderland by the Armenian merchants.<sup>18</sup>

The trade expansion between Europe and the Levant over the Mediterranean was conditioned by two facts: first, the sea route from any European country to the Middle East was much shorter; and second, it was less dangerous than over the ocean. For this reason, the European countries conducted their trade with the countries in the Middle East over the Eastern Mediterranean basin commercial

<sup>15</sup>G. Fischer, *Barbary Legend: War, Trade, and Piracy in North Africa, 1415-1830*, (Oxford, 1957), p. 176.

<sup>16</sup>Zak'aria Agulets'u *oragrut'iwne*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup>Yuri Barsegov, "Delo korolevskogo pirata Kidda," [The Case of the Royal Pirate Kidd] *Istoriko-filologicheskii jurnal*, no. 3 (1986), p. 189.

<sup>18</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere . . .*, pp. 56-57.

centers, and made immediate contact with the Armenian khojas engaged in the international trade.

Thus, in the absence of national statehood, and deprived of any form of support, the Armenian merchants, in conditions of competition with the European manufacturing countries' bourgeoisie, emerged as an important link in the merchandise interchange between the East and the West in the seventeenth century. This aspect of the Armenians' activity (meaning trade), according to the prominent historian N. Adonts, was closely tied to the international issues. The appearance of the Armenian merchants in the international market signified the new spirit that lies at the root of the contemporary civilization. It indicated the significance of Armenia as a factor in the emergence of the new world, reflected in the mutual relationship of the East and the West.<sup>19</sup>

The Armenian merchants involved in the international trade began to successfully compete with the powerful European trading houses and mercantile bourgeoisie not only because they had a monopoly over the caravan trade, but mainly because they were satisfied with the relatively smaller profits which was unacceptable to the European merchants. Furthermore, the geographical position of Armenia (bridging Europe and Asia), with the trading routes of international significance traversing over its territory made it a connecting link in East-West commodity exchange.<sup>20</sup>

Contributing significantly to the growth of the Armenian merchant class was the policy of the two major states in the Near East. In this regard Leo writes: "Persia and Turkey are dependent on contemporary Europe by close commercial interests. Because of that, they deliberately or randomly assumed such a stance that contributed to the advancement on the domestic scale among various nationalities living in both countries, which shone with business talents."<sup>21</sup> According to

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<sup>19</sup>N. Adonts, *Iz istorii armianskoko voproza*, Nauchno-informatsionnei biulleten sektora nauchnoi informatsii AN Armenii, seria 3, [From the History of the Armenian Question], (Erevan, 1984), p. 48.

<sup>20</sup>See K. S. Papazian, *Merchants from Ararat*.

<sup>21</sup>Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, vol. III, p. 11.

the French traveler, Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, the Safavids followed a policy of religious tolerance towards the Armenians since their being Christian facilitated trade relations between Iran and the European countries.<sup>22</sup>

An important factor facilitating the trade of the Armenian merchants with the European countries was the growing commercial competition among the European powers in the Levant. This situation forced the Armenian merchants to seek new, free markets. In addition, the efforts of the European powers to disrupt the activities of the Armenian merchants in the Levant through hindrances created by their consulates became more forceful and severe. Fulfilling their responsibility as trade representatives of their respective countries, the European consuls attempted to dictate the prices of the goods, often subjecting them to boycotts, etc. In response, the Armenian khojas tried to export their goods directly to Europe, especially when they promised them higher profits.

To resist the competitive struggle unleashed by the European trade houses against them, the Armenian merchants continuously maintained flexibility in their dealings. For instance, in the seventeenth century, they followed the example of the Europeans by forming trade companies. Such companies had been in existence in New Julfa, the town of Karbi located in the jurisdiction of the Khanate of Erevan, Aleppo, Tiflis (Tbilisi), etc.<sup>23</sup> The Armenian merchants now had to adopt European business practices, learn the languages, study the local customs and traditions, and the banking and loan systems, as well as become familiar with the realities of the European markets, the demand for Eastern products in those markets, and engage in cooperation with European commercial companies and money-lending institutions. And, finally, they were compelled to establish contacts with the European ruling circles.

<sup>22</sup>Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un Voyage . . .*, p. 158.

<sup>23</sup>Zak'aria Sarkawag, *Patmagrut'iwn*, pp. 131-32. Ar. Ark'. Siwrmeyean, *Patmut'iwn* . . . , pp. 288-89. Zak'aria Aguletsi, *Oragrut'iwn*, pp. 72-73.

For instance, in 1696, Pope Innocent XII granted honorary citizenship of Rome to the Shahrmanians, one of the wealthy merchant families of Julfa which gave them the right to conduct free trade in Rome and Ancona.<sup>24</sup> And in 1699, the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I Habsburg granted the Shahrmanian family status equal to the Austrian nobility. The monarch also granted to their entire clan the title of count which entitled them to a family coat of arms.<sup>25</sup>

The Shahrmanians, following the pattern of the European powers, formed a trade company, which had a principal capital of seven hundred twenty thousand dukats in various Venetian banks.<sup>26</sup> The company had a loan "maya" (fund) for the numerous Armenian merchants engaged in the international trade in many countries. The company had its offices and trade representatives ("sarkar") in almost every major trading center of that time.

Among the most prominent leaders of this merchant family were Margar and Zakar Shahrmanian. Later, Manuel and Astvatsatur Shahrmanian established permanent residence in Europe, taking with them about two million dukats.<sup>27</sup>

The activities of this merchant family were not limited to Europe and the regions of the Near East. They conducted extensive commerce with India, Southeast Asia and the countries of the Far East. According to contemporary accounts, the Shahrmanian family enjoyed legitimacy and prestige in the Iranian royal court, thanks to their wealth and extensive foreign connections.<sup>28</sup>

In New Julfa Khoja Minasents, Aghazarians or Lazarians, and other families also had leading trade companies.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iwn hayots gagh't'akanut'ean . . .*, p. 211.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.299-307. *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia . . .*, vol.1, p.485; vol.2, p. 1358.

<sup>26</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'iwn Nor Jughayu*, pp. 110-15.

<sup>27</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iwn hayots'*, p. 207.

<sup>28</sup>R. Gulbenkian, "Philippe de Zagly, Marchand Arménien de Julfa et l'établissement du commerce Persan en Courlande en 1696," *Extrait de la Revue d'Etudes Arméniennes*, new series, vol. VII, (Paris, 1970), p. 366.

<sup>29</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'iwn . . .*, pp.143-45, 256-57. Shushanik Khachikian, *Nor Jughayi hay vacharakanut'iwne ew nra arewtratntesakan kapere Rusastani het 17-18-rd darerum [Merchants of New Julfa and Their Trade-Economic Ties with Russia in the 17th-18th Centuries]*, (Erevan, 1988), p. 81-120.

All the Armenian trading companies, without exception, were simultaneously involved in banking and money lending activities. The Armenian moneylender merchant was called "agha", and the loan recipient "enker",<sup>30</sup> and the most widely adopted methods of providing loans was what was once known in Europe as *komenda*.<sup>31</sup>

Due to the lack of security of human life and property in the East, the Armenian merchants usually kept their money in the European banks, which helped their trade activities to expand. It is known, for example that the Armenian merchants had major stocks in the famous Banco Dolfin del Venice,<sup>32</sup> and Margar Shahrmanian, mentioned above, had a deposit of seven hundred thousand dukats in Banco di San Marco of that city. Thus, like the Armenian *chelebis* in Turkey, the Armenians of Julfa also engaged in banking activities, loan lending, and money exchange, etc.

In the seventeenth century, the Eastern and Western Armenian khojas were already conducting extensive trade activities in the European countries. It is not coincidental that the Frenchman Tournefort has written that the Armenian merchants "not only were the masters of the Levantine trade, but also noticeably the masters of the trade in major cities of Europe."

The Italian city-states, and primarily the Republic of Venice, were the oldest trade partners of the Armenian merchants.

The wave of Armenian immigration to this city began as early as in the eleventh century. Subsequent to the fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia in the fifteenth century, as mentioned above, thirty thousand Armenians from Cilicia moved to Europe and among many countries and cities, a number of them settled in Venice. By the late fifteenth century, the city-state was the leading maritime power in the Christian world.

The Venetian noble Caterino Zeno, in lieu of the various services rendered by the Armenians, in the fifteenth century built a church

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 126-38.

<sup>32</sup>Alishan, *Hay-Venet.*, p. 371.



named Surb Khach (Holy Cross). Later, in 1688, Khoja Grigor Mirmanian of Julfa renovated that church.<sup>33</sup>

The seventeenth century constitutes a period of decline of the economic and political influence of the Italian states. The intermediary trade with the Levant was drastically curtailed, and the majority of the merchants turned to agriculture. In the sixteenth century, the Turks had conquered the Greek holdings of the Venetian Republic, which resulted in a complete severance of its trade ties with the East. Under these circumstances, cooperation with the Armenian merchants became crucial for Venice. Such cooperation enabled the Venetians to obtain Eastern goods and raw materials, especially raw silk. It also allowed the Italians to resist to some extent, powerful commercial competitors such as the English, French, and Dutch. The English had to confess that "disrupting entirely the trade between Venetians and Armenians was absolutely impossible."<sup>34</sup>

The Senate of the Republic of Venice, in the light of the above consideration, granted numerous rights and privileges to the Armenian merchants, periodically reducing the customs duties due from them.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in compliance with the decision of the Senate of Venice, adopted on March 5, 1537, the customs duty on the importation of Iranian silk from the Syrian seaports to Venice was set at six percent.<sup>36</sup> The Venetian Senate again reduced the duty set for the Iranian silk in 1567, 1574, and 1576. These decisions were overwhelmingly approved by the legislative body in 1589, 1591, etc. The Senate decree of December 29, 1589 says: "The Iranian silk has to be imported from the Syrian seaports, inspected by the consuls in Damascus and Aleppo where the taxes should be paid according to privileged customs tariffs set by the March 5, 1537 decision."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iwn hayots' gaght'akanut'ean*, pp.212-15.

<sup>34</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'iwnner*, p. 411.

<sup>35</sup>G. Berchet, *La Republica di Venezia . . .*, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.* See also, Gh. Alishan, *Hay-Venet.*, pp.431, 464-65.

On March 5, 1614, the Senate of Venice adopted a special decision regarding the further reduction of the customs fee and taxes on the import of Iranian raw silk. On May 2 of the same year, the Senate of Venice made another decision to exempt all the silk imported from the Safavid State through the Syrian seaports from the six per cent customs duty for a duration of six years.<sup>38</sup>

Kostand Jughayets'i in his *Ashkharhazhoghov* has written: "The imported goods to Venice were exempt from customs duties. But the goods which were exported from Venice were charged ten per cent customs duty."<sup>39</sup> This privilege was granted exclusively to the Iranian-Armenian merchants. It is evident from the special article included in the decision, that all the merchants importing silk to Venice via Aleppo had to present the Venetian consul in Syria with indisputable evidence that the merchandise was real "Persian" silk. Thus, the Senate's decision, did not include the Turkish silk, which indicated the sharp confrontation in this period between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire.

Ghevond Alishan assumes that the above decision of the Venetian Senate was adopted at the suggestion of the New Julfa merchant, Khoja Safar, who had traveled to Venice as an ambassador of Shah Abbas I to conduct commercial and political negotiations with the Republic. As a confirmation of that version, Alishan indicates that after Khoja Safar's negotiations, the trade and commodity exchange between the Julfa and Venice merchants increased substantially.<sup>40</sup>

The Venetian Senate records of the April 24, 1640 meeting state that "supporting that nation (Armenia) is greatly beneficial to us, since the Armenian merchants are engaged in large scale trade, and import to Venice a variety of Eastern goods, among which the most valuable is raw silk."<sup>41</sup> In another document, dated 1651, the Venetian authorities declare: "At present, it is to our advantage to

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>M. Mashrots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, Dzer. No. 8443, p.165b.

<sup>40</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 419.

<sup>41</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'ivn hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean*, p. 215.



encourage trade with the Armenians, granting them broad rights.<sup>42</sup> In other recordings of the Venetian chancellery, the Armenian nation was described by the upper house [of the Senate] as "thankful nation" (*nazione Benemerita*) "gracious," "most likable," "affectionate," "useful," "always profitable" "meritorious", etc. As a sign of amity, the Parliament of Venice decreed that Armenians could freely sell their goods at St. Mark's Plaza without paying any taxes.<sup>43</sup>

At the core of the Venetian behavior towards the Armenian merchants was the concern that the Armenians could reorient their commercial activities towards other competing Italian republics. One of the records of the Venetian Senate states that it is imperative to grant all kinds of facilities to the Armenian merchants, because otherwise, they would direct their goods towards Livorno or Genoa.<sup>44</sup>

Till the direct visits of the Iranian-Armenian merchants to Venice, the important Armenian merchant-khojas of Turkey and Western Armenia conducted active trade with this commercial city, called the "Queen of the Adriatic". These included prominent Armenian merchants from Istanbul, Smyrna, Amid, Angora, Trebizond, Bursa, Siurihisar, Hesnkeyf, as well as the ancient Armenian commercial centers of Sis, Ayas, Adana, Garaman, Cesearea, Hromkla, Karkar, Urha, Akn, Karin, Erzinka (Erzincan), Baghesh, Baberd, Van and other cities.<sup>45</sup> The number of merchants coming from the Crimea, and Transcaucasus (Nakhijevan, Ghapan, Siunik, Karabagh, Julfa, etc) was not insignificant either.

One of them, for instance, was Pirezade Ghapants'i, who between 1586-1587 had been not only to Venice, but also to various other cities of Europe. In his travel diaries, he writes in simple language that "I am the humble Pirezade from Ghezelbash (Iran), from the land of Ghapan, native of the gorge of Vorotan, the village of Getatagh, and the clan of Pastamets, grandson of Zakar Mirza, son of Hromsim (mother Hripsime), Isayus paron, brother of Pahlav. Once in the year

<sup>42</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 447.

<sup>43</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'wn hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean*, p. 216.

<sup>44</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Hay-Venet*, p. 323

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.428-29.

1586-1587 I separated from my family and relatives and began my sojourn to unknown lands: first to the city of Van, then to the city of Hizu, from there to Qarahamit, and from there to Iznaymit, and from there to the city of Istanbul that is the seat of the monarch." Later, through the countries of the basin of the river Danube, he reached Poland, thence to Danzig (Gdansk), Prague, and finally Italy. "The land of Deyilan, the city of Venice which is ruled by twelve tribunes, and is the burial cite of St. Mark the Evangelist. It is located in the sea, having 6000 bridges, and being a large and fascinating city. From there, I went on a vessel to Genoa and Ancona, and thence to the city of Rome, etc."<sup>46</sup>

In a short time, the Eastern Armenian merchants, especially those of Julfa, managed to concentrate a significant portion of the trade with Venice in their hands. In the commercial strife they were either able to force out their Western Armenian competitors or made them cooperate under terms most favorable to them.

Among the major Armenian merchant families established in Venice were: Gerak Mirmans (1588-1750), Shahumians (1650-1757), Shahrmanians (1697-1800), Sinanians (1667-1712), Martirosians (1690-1737), Zand Aghamir (1690-1713), Vanets'i Davtians (1670-1742), Ghapants'i Nahapetians (1718-1738) and many others.<sup>47</sup>

Based on the court chancery documents, Ghevond Alishan has prepared a list of over two thousand Armenians conducting business in Venice between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Armenian trade in Venice enjoyed a solid period of growth from the beginning of the seventeenth century. This also contributed to the rejuvenation of the Armenian community, which dated back to the twelfth century. Beginning with the second half of the sixteenth century, a new wave of Armenians migrated to Italy. That migration took place not only because of the Turco-Iranian wars, the insecure conditions in Armenia, stagnation of the economic life, plunder and

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 458-59.

<sup>47</sup>A. G. Abrahamian, *Hamarot urwagits hay gagh'tawayrerer patmut'ean* [A Brief Survey of the History of Diaspora Armenian Communities], vol. I, (Erevan, 1964), p. 297.

pillage which gradually forced Armenians out of their fatherland in search of safer places, but also as an outcome of the rapid formation of the Armenian commercial bourgeoisie. The latter plunged straight away into the search for new markets. The number of Julfa merchants in Venice became so large that the street next to the S. Maria Formosa was named "Julfa Street."<sup>48</sup> Simeon the Pole (Lehats'i) in his travel diary (1612) reminisces about an Armenian stone-built church with its hostels and adjacent buildings in Venice.<sup>49</sup> In that city, the major Armenian trading houses from Iran, Turkey, France, Poland, Russia, and other countries had their representatives.

Trade between the Republic of Venice and the Armenian khojas developed extensively during the periodically flaring up Turco-Venetian wars and of Candia in particular that lasted over twenty-five years (1645-1669). The Armenian merchants had always been sympathetic towards Turkey's adversary. For example, Margar Shahrimanian in 1693 loaned 200,000 dukats to the Republic of Venice for the war efforts against Turkey.<sup>50</sup>

Until the mid-seventeenth century, among the Italian cities, Genoa occupied an important position in the intermediary trade between the East and Europe. A competitor of Venice, Genoa made every effort to attract the Armenian merchants, providing them broad rights and privileges. In 1623, Genoa even accepted the Armenian merchants' suggestion to establish jointly an "East India Trading Company," with the purpose of conducting trade with India and Iran, and shipping the latter's raw silk directly to Genoa.<sup>51</sup> The company existed until the mid-seventeenth century.

The Armenian khojas also had significant commercial interests and a substantial volume of trade with the Italian port of Livorno. M. Ughurlean, a researcher of the history of the Armenian community of that city, writes that according to a source dated 1582, an Armenian

<sup>48</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iwn hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean* . . . , p. 214.

<sup>49</sup>See Simeon dpri Lehats'voy Ughegrut'iwn [Travel Journal], *Handes Amsorea*, nos. 3-4 (1934); Simeon Lehats'i, *Ughegrut'iwn*, (Vienna, 1936).

<sup>50</sup>*A Chronicle of Carmelites* . . . , vol. I, p. 438.

<sup>51</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 450.

merchant of Livorno, Khoja Kirakos Mirman, held the position of the consul of the Persian king in Tuscany.<sup>52</sup> This information indicates that since the mid-sixteenth century, the Armenian émigré community doubtlessly existed in Livorno and a large part of it consisted of merchants. Armenians were among the first to import merchandise from the East to the cities of Tuscany, such as Florence, and Livorno, where they enjoyed various privileges and freedoms.

Intending to boost the commercial status of Livorno, the ruler of Tuscany, Grand Duke Ferdinando I Medici (who is known in history for becoming a cardinal at the age of fifteen and subsequently abandoning his cardinal's hat for the throne in 1587), on June 10, 1593, issued a decree, inviting the merchants of various nationalities, including Armenians, to settle "individually or with their families" in Livorno or Pisa and to start trading with the East. "I call upon all of you, o merchants of every nation, of East and West, Spanish and Portuguese, Greeks, Teutonic, Italians, Jewish, Turkish, Armenians, Persians, and others, greetings to you all."<sup>53</sup>

The forty-point decree of Ferdinando I granted to the merchants coming to Livorno various privileges, monopolies, freedoms, tax-exemption, absolute religious freedom, right to free trade, "security and guaranty to manage freely the earned money, pardon of the past crimes, freedom of association, assistance to the movement of merchants, travel benefits, etc."<sup>54</sup>

As a result of Medici's policy, Livorno became a "magnet" for the Armenian merchants. "Since then, the number of merchants, and caravans, belonging to Armenians from Asia and Gilan, Nukhi, Ganja, and so forth, loaded with bales of raw and refined silk, and various other goods of different quality began to grow."<sup>55</sup>

The Armenian merchants from Iran, India, and Middle Eastern countries shipped to Tuscany felt, silk products, spices, cochineal, pearls, precious stones, Damascus silk taffetas, jewelry, wax, and

<sup>52</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iwn hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean . . .*, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 253-55.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>Gh. Alishan *Sisakan*, p. 455.

various other goods. In 1671, an Armenian named Petros from Ghapan held the position of Iranian Senior Consul in Livorno.<sup>56</sup> He was succeeded by Grigor Mirman (Grigor Gerak) and his heirs who, in the time of Cosimo III, were acknowledged as a princely family. Two medals minted in 1673, have the portrait of Grigor Gerak's inscribed on them.<sup>57</sup> The other side of the medal depicts the "Lord's Sheep", on the left, a lion from whose back emerges the sun, and underneath, a beehive towards which buzzes a queen bee. According to A. Sarkisian, that portrait "is a metaphor for hard work and extensive activities."<sup>58</sup> However, it would be closer to reality if below the beehive one could see Khoja Gerak's wealthy son's treasury, and opposite the queen bee, tens of their executives, who went from country to country to fill that treasury with sacks of gold.<sup>59</sup>

On June 17, 1683, a large group of prominent Armenian merchants signed the "First Armenian covenant" for the construction of a church in Livorno "for the sake of our nation." The covenant specifically emphasized that the shelter that was to be built next to the church, was to be utilized by the poor, and not only by the Armenians. "Because many nationalities living in this city, such as the Greeks, the French, and the Dutch take care of the needy. Therefore, our people also should act similarly and not tolerate discrimination. Furthermore, the future generations in this city should be considered brethren and compatriots. And they would live in the society of love, and all of them as one nation benefit from all the privileges, as our nation enjoys the same in this city."<sup>60</sup>

To receive permission for the construction of the Armenian church in Livorno from the "Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith" (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide), the Armenians of Livorno sent as their representative "Paron Astvatsatur Oghlankeshish," also known

<sup>56</sup>*Handes Amsoreay*, 1887, pp. 170-71, 194-96.

<sup>57</sup>Armenag Sarkisian, *Pages d'Art Arménien*, (Paris, 1940), p.115-16.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>59</sup>*Hovhannes Ter Dawt'ean Jughayets'u hashwetomare*. [The Account Book of Hovhannes Ter Dawt'ean Jughayets'i], Kazmets'in L. Khachikian ew H. P'ap'azian (eds.), (Erevan, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>60</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'wn hayots' gagh't'akanut'ean . . .*, pp. 256-57.



as Agha de Matus, to Rome. Oghlankeshish carried the recommendations of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo III and his "foster brother," addressed to the Prefect of the "Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith" Cardinal Carlo Agostino Fabroni. Rome granted permission on the condition that the appellants would accept eight-point "theologies - dogmas" which would put the Armenian merchants of Livorno and the Armenian Church under the supervision of St. Peter's See.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the Vatican did not miss the opportunity to bring the Armenian trade capital under its control. In fact, Rome's permission to build an Armenian church in Livorno was received only after a lengthy delay, on March 8, 1701.

On March 18, 1697, the Livorno Armenians also adopted a so-called "national constitution." This document, along with various issues concerning the domestic life of the community, also included a point regarding the conditions of the payment of national dues by the Armenians who were engaged in trade in the city of Livorno. "If the commercial goods constitute items such as silk-worm, needlework, textiles, furs, cochineal, coral, amber, blue, indigo, they should pay one bezzo per load, and if they are honey wax, and other items related to the Italian trade, they should pay one-half bezzo per load." The Council appointed one of the khojas, named Chilabkhan Margarian, as the collector of the dues. The Council also decided to appeal to the Grand Duke of Livorno, Cosimo III, to endorse the decision of the Council, and impose it by legislation not only on the Armenian residents of Livorno, but also on those Armenian merchants who visited Livorno on business.<sup>62</sup>

The number of Julfa Armenians who settled in Venice, Genoa, and Livorno was so large that Archbishop Stepanos Jughayets'i entitled his 1688 writing as "Letter of Blessing to the Christ-loving and... Julfites, beloved and close brethren of ours, who live in Godly cities of Venice, Livorno, and Genoa."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>63</sup>A. Alpayajean, *Patmut'wn hay gagh't'akanut'ean*, p. 450.

Due to the financial contributions of the Armenian merchants, between 1643-1702, Livorno occupied an important place in Armenian printing.<sup>64</sup>

The Armenian merchants in Italy also conducted large scale trade with the city-republic of Lucca, with the dukedoms of Ferrara and Piacenza, the "eternal city" Rome, and with Bologna, Palmi, Fabriana, Forli, Perugia, Naples, Milan, Florence, Pisa, Padua, Turin, Bavaria, Pistoia, Siena, Viterbo, Emilia, and other cities. A large number of Armenians settled in the seaport adjacent to the city of Ravenna, which has often been called "Armenia." In fact, in the altar of one of the famous churches of this city is located the tomb of Sahak Kamsarakan who at one time was the mayor of that city and who died in 664.<sup>65</sup> Beginning with the thirteenth century, the Armenian merchants also frequented the coastal city of Ancona, where the Armenians had their own church.

Unfortunately, the details of the commercial ties of the Armenian merchants with the above cities on an individual basis are not available. However, it is certain that in the seventeenth century, Armenian communities existed in all the above mentioned cities. The Armenians who settled in the various cities and seaports of Europe had friendly and close relations with each other. Very often, members of the same family opened trading offices in several cities and seaports and were in constant contact with each other.<sup>66</sup>

The activities of Armenian merchants in France also were remarkably extensive. It is true that the hub of their operations was the Levant, where France, subsequent to the receipt of the capitulations from the Ottoman Sultans in the sixteenth century, gained solid positions.<sup>67</sup> However, the Armenian merchants also visited France proper via the Mediterranean. In general, France was able to utilize the mercantile traditions of the Mediterranean with great success,

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<sup>64</sup>See *Bazmavep*, (1937), pp. 229-35.

<sup>65</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'iwn hayots' gaght'akanut'ean . . .*, pp. 212-50.

<sup>66</sup>Fr. Macler, *Quatre Conférences sur l'Arménie*, p. 40.

<sup>67</sup>See P. Masson, *Histoire du Commerce Français dans le Levant au XVII-e siècle*.



and, thus, Marseilles became the heir of the classical Middle Age Italian cities' Levantine trade.<sup>68</sup>

Trade through Marseilles was also conducted with Spain, Italy, and Africa.

In the seventeenth century, the commercial cities of the Atlantic coast, especially those of Nantes, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, and Dieppe, gained major significance. The city of Le Havre, established in 1517 at the time of Francis I, later became the largest French seaport.

In the seventeenth century, the France could not compete with England on either the ocean and or the land routes . At the same time, the French merchants did not engage in caravan trade at all. Therefore, for the French commercial bourgeoisie also, trade cooperation with the Armenian merchants gained importance.

According to several sources, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Armenian khojas attempted to secure permission from the King of France to settle in all major French cities.<sup>69</sup> Having received such permission, soon they engaged in broad commercial activity that they became serious competitors of the native merchants. Based on their complaints filed with the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce, on December 10, 1622, the city hall decreed that captains of French ships were strictly prohibited from transporting any Armenian merchants or goods belonging to them, to the Levant from Marseilles and vice versa. The order also decreed that the captains sign an affidavit, which obligated them to pay a fine of ten thousand gold coins should they violate the above order in the same year. The assembly of the southeastern French region Provence issued a similar decree in which it declared its solidarity with the Marseilles mayoral council. In addition, the assembly's decree mentioned that the Armenian merchants were prohibited from exporting gold and silver from Marseilles.<sup>70</sup> A similar decision was adopted in Toulon. The

<sup>68</sup>G. Tongas, *Les relations de la France avec l'Empire Ottoman durant la première moitié du XVII siècle*, p. 199.

<sup>69</sup>Fr. Macler, "Notes de manuscrits arméniens ou relatifs aux Arméniens, vues dans quelques bibliothèques de la péninsule iberique et du sud-est de la France," *Revue d'Etudes Arméniennes*, t. II, Paris, 1922.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.10-13, 14-20. 170 L. Khachikian ew H' P'ap'azian, Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean Jughayets'u hashwetomare, pp. 14-15.

French authorities periodically continued to restrict the trade activities of their competitors.<sup>71</sup> The tenacity of these efforts brought the situation to a such point that the seaports of Marseilles and Toulon were closed to the Armenian merchants. One of the objectives of the French authorities' policy was also to hurt Turkey economically, because one of the most important foreign policy goals of Louis XIV was to close the Mediterranean Sea for the Turks.<sup>72</sup>

Undoubtedly, the closing of the French seaports was a heavy blow to the Armenian merchants. In specific, it was harmful for Iranian-European trade, including the Iranian-French trade, because till 1664 France had practically no direct commercial relations with Iran, though France constituted the largest importer of Iranian raw silk. It is not accidental that the khojas of Julfa were among the first to engage in the Armenian merchants' efforts for the opening of the French seaports. They also involved Catholic missionaries, who were active in Iran. Thus, in 1628, the New Julfa kalantar (mayor and provost), Khoja Nazar, was able to persuade the Capuchin Order member, Pacific, to mediate with the French court to halt the persecution of the Armenian merchants and lift the trade restrictions imposed on them. In return, Khoja Safar who had influence in the Persian court, arranged an audience with Shah Abbas I for the French missionary so that the Capuchin order mission could be established in the city of Isfahan.<sup>73</sup>

Such mediation soon brought about positive results. Despite the fact that the government of France had already passed a series of laws aimed at sponsoring and protecting the French trade, which were applied indiscriminately to all the foreign competitors of France,<sup>74</sup> in November 23, 1629, the special order "patent" of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu was issued by which the Armenian

<sup>71</sup>Fr. Macler, "Notes de manuscrits arméniens . . .," pp. 22-41.

<sup>72</sup>Missac, "Le Père Otoman (1644-1676)," *Revue d'Etudes Diplomatique*, Paris, 17-e année, (1903), p. 365.

<sup>73</sup>P. Pacifique, *Relation du Voyage en Perse*, (Lille, 1632) t. II, p. 423.

<sup>74</sup>N. N. Rozental, *Istoriia Evropy v epokhu torgovogo kapitala [History of Europe in the Epoch of Trade Capital]*, (Leningrad, 1927), p. 126.

merchants were permitted to freely enter and exit the Marseilles seaport. However, the exception made for the Armenian merchants was not only a result of the kind gestures of Shah Abbas towards the Order of Capuchins, which was strongly supported by France. As mentioned earlier, the Armenian khojas played an important role in this. The essential point is that both the king and Cardinal Richelieu realized that in the area of Eastern trade, the main competitors of France were Holland and England, and not the Levantine merchants. And, on the contrary, cooperation with the Eastern merchants was somehow even beneficial for France. However, the main problem was that none of those merchants had a naval fleet, and the weak French commercial fleet was unable to compete with the Dutch and English navies.

Therefore, a significant portion of the goods was transported from the Levantine markets to France by ships using the English and Dutch flags. This created some commonality of interest between the Dutch and English merchants, on the one hand, and the Eastern merchants, on the other. In addition, the Dutch merchants, for example, in Marseilles obtained large quantities of Eastern goods from the Armenian merchants involved in wholesale trade, to resell in various European markets. The French suffered doubly as a result of this, since in the very same city, Marseilles, the Dutch sold felt to the Armenian merchants, which hurt the French felt manufacturers. And since it was difficult for the French customs authorities to determine whose goods were coming and by which ship to Marseilles, they had unknowingly accepted the above mentioned decree in 1622.

Besides, in granting the "patent", Cardinal Richelieu was guided by some political considerations also. It is well known that Richelieu was considered a staunch supporter of the expansion of the influence of France in the Eastern countries. Therefore, he regarded Christians residing in the Eastern countries as supporters of French policy and tried to win their cooperation in every way possible.

As a farsighted politician with a pragmatic mentality, Richelieu placed great hopes in the merchant bourgeoisie of nations of the

East. He was, of course, well aware of the role that the Armenian merchants played in international trade and the East-West economic relationship.

It is not accidental that the Cardinal who controlled French state politics had plans to settle the Armenian merchants in the major commercial cities of France, Marseilles in particular, where they could immediately engage in the Levantine trade.<sup>75</sup> Finally, Cardinal Richelieu realized that in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, the positive stance of the influential Armenian khoja class and clergy, the promoter of its interests, was an important factor in securing the successful activities of the Catholic missionaries. The latter, at the same time, were certainly the front-runners of the expansionistic policies of France.

The 1629 license gave an unprecedented boost to the trade conducted by the Armenian merchants with France. In addition, the authorities in Marseilles began to charge them lower customs duties. However, this situation did not last long. In 1634, due to the pressure of the French merchants, the Marseilles city council again restricted the Armenian merchants' trade by increasing import custom duty for every bale of raw silk from 16 franc to 112 franc. In 1650, new restrictions were imposed on the Armenian merchants. A fifty per cent customs duty was levied on their goods to "deter them from visiting Marseilles again."<sup>76</sup>

As a result, trade with Marseilles almost came to a halt. Thus, if earlier the Armenian ship brought on an average 1000-1200 bales of raw silk and various other goods to Marseilles, in 1658, the entire amount of imported silk did not surpass even one hundred bales.<sup>77</sup>

However, as a result of the closing of Marseilles to the Armenian merchants, the Eastern trade of France also, in a short period of time, sustained major losses. Due to this reason, the situation demanded a

<sup>75</sup>A. G. M. Masnaki *patmut'iwn hay metsatunneru* [Partial History of Uppermost Armenian Families], (Istanbul, 1909), pp. 28-29.

<sup>76</sup>Ch. D. Tekeian, *Marseille, La Provence et les Arméniens*, (Marseille, 1929), pp. 17-18. See also H. Samuelian, *Les Arméniens en France depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours. Le Foyer*, III-ème année, no.35 1 er Avril (Paris, 1930).

<sup>77</sup>Fr. Macler, "Notes de manuscrits arméniens . . .", p. 40.

review of the decisions and laws adopted by the French authorities regarding trade restrictions.

Cardinal Mazarin's administration, under the rule of Louis XIV (1643-1715) is identified by the development of a new policy, which aimed at strengthening the position of the French bourgeoisie. One of the components of that policy included the removal of restrictions imposed on the Eastern merchants.<sup>78</sup> This modification occurred because the competitors of France, Holland in particular, was able to increasingly attract the trade conducted by the Eastern merchants, thus, seriously harming both local French production and foreign trade. Antwerp, for example, was able to take over the raw silk trade almost completely, depriving French silk mills of raw materials and, thus, ruining the silk production of France.<sup>79</sup>

Accordingly, France adopted drastic changes in its policy towards the Eastern merchants. They were again encouraged to trade with Marseilles. Chief Minister Jules Mazarin made great efforts in this direction, trying in every way possible to attract the Armenian merchants, especially encouraging them to do business with Marseilles.

The policy adopted by the French government was consistently put into practice by the prominent political figure of the seventeenth century, the Comptroller General of Finance and the then Secretary of State for Naval Affairs, Jean Baptiste Colbert. As the most successful practitioner of the mercantile system, he made every effort to enable his country to participate in international trade, establish model factories, step up the productivity of industry, and compete in the world market. As a result, he succeeded in expanding French industry and trade.

Colbert's advisors realized that the only way to revitalize French trade with the Levant and the countries of the East in general, and compete successfully against the English and the Dutch, was to

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<sup>78</sup>A. Aubrey, *Histoire du Cardinal Mazarin*, t. 3 (Amsterdam, 1718), pp. 333-39.

<sup>79</sup>E. Lavisse, *Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à la Révolution*, t. 5, (Paris, 1911), 1er part, p. 270.



strengthen the caravan trade over Turkey. And this could be done only with the help of the Armenian merchants.<sup>80</sup>

Hence in 1667, Colbert prepared a tax index, a "tariff" system, which represented protective tax measures, and a whole system for imported goods.<sup>81</sup> In the sphere of Eastern trade, in order to successfully compete with the English and the Dutch, in 1664, Colbert created the "French East India Company," and in 1669, formed the "Levant Company."<sup>82</sup> Thereafter, Marseilles was declared an open seaport ("Porto Franco").<sup>83</sup> In this regard, an edict issued by Louis XIV and Colbert stated that all ships entering and exiting the seaport of Marseilles were exempt of all taxes, and that the seaport from then on was declared free and accessible for all merchants and all kinds of goods.<sup>84</sup> Cities like Toulon, Dunkirk, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes, and others were also declared free. Thus, the Levant-France trade route was once again opened to the Armenian merchants. In order to encourage their trade with France, Jean Baptiste Colbert granted them privileges which "no other Eastern nation and no one," enjoyed. Another important undertaking in the area of the expansion of France's Eastern trade was the 1665 reorganization of French commercial consulates in the Middle East.

Besides, in 1687, Louis XIV ordered the French consul of Smyrna to extend his protection on the Armenian merchants.<sup>85</sup>

There were several motivations of the French government for this new policy. First, weakened by the European wars, and the complicated developments in France itself, the country was unable

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<sup>80</sup>R. du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660*, p. XLV. Poulet, *Nouvelles relations du Levant*, partie I, (Paris 1668), pp. 434-35.

<sup>81</sup>R. Iu. Veller, *Chetyre veka evropeiskoi istorii [Four Centuries of European History]*, (Moscow, 1924), pp.81-82.

<sup>82</sup>N. Rocca, "La France en Orient depuis les Rois de France jusqu'à nos jours," *Aperçu historique*, (Paris, Chalamel, 1876) p. 103.

<sup>83</sup>Haykakan tparan i Marseil, *Bazmavep*, h. kh.t., 1891, June issue, pp. 207-208. Ch. Perigot, *Histoire du Commerce Francais*, pp. 207-08.

<sup>84</sup>*Recueil des règlements généraux et particuliers concernant les manufactures, et fabrique du Royaume*, t. 1, (Paris, 1730), pp. 183-89.

<sup>85</sup>Hayk Ter-Astwatsatreants', *Hay vacharakanut'iwne Rusliayum [Armenian Merchants in Russia]*, (Paris, 1906), p. 47.

to promote trade with the Levant. Also, France was unable to guarantee the importation of Eastern goods on its own. Therefore, the French concluded that the success of their trade in the East in general, and Iran in particular, depended exclusively on the cooperation and goodwill of the Armenian merchants.

The intervention of Louis XIV in 1671 in favor of the French East India Company resulted in the issuing of a new *firman* (decree) by Shah Abbas II, which granted the French citizens in Iran privileges and rights similar to those granted to the English and Dutch merchants.<sup>86</sup> However, France was unable to expand its trade with Iran subsequent to the above decree in part because of the 1672-1679 Franco-Dutch war. The main obstacle in the expansion of Franco-Iranian trade was the lack of a powerful commercial fleet. France was not able to compete on the oceanic routes with the English and the Dutch, and was compelled to use only the Mediterranean route, which too entailed serious problems. Apart from the competition with the English and the Dutch in the Levant, the French merchants did not have direct commercial links by the land route with Iran over Turkish territory, and were forced to use the intermediary services of the Armenian merchants.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, the Levant-France trade route was once again opened to the Armenian merchants. Although Colbert implemented a mercantile policy of protectionism and an active trade balance policy, in respect of the Armenians, as a rule, French customs officials did not diligently implement these principles. Apart from that, the French government ordered that the goods imported by the Armenian merchants were to be paid for only in cash. The English and the Dutch preferred to make payment by barter or non-cash arrangements, which were not beneficial to the Armenians, hence, the latter began to give preference to the French.<sup>88</sup>

Taking advantage of this friendly treatment, in 1687, the Armenian *khojas* asked for permission to open private trading houses in

<sup>86</sup>Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. II, (London, 1951), p. 195.

<sup>87</sup>Pouillet, *Nouvelles relations du Levant*, pp. 434-36.

<sup>88</sup>H. Ter-Astwatsatreants', *Hay vacharakanut'iwne . . .*, p. 47.



Marseilles and Bordeaux. In addition, they filed an appeal to establish in France an "India Company," which would specialize in the trade with India, China, the Near Eastern countries, and the Levant. Under pressure from the French merchants, Louis XIV rejected the request, but the Armenians were, however, permitted to establish trading houses in the southern seaports of France.<sup>89</sup>

Colbert also encouraged printing of books by the Armenians in Marseilles, in view of the fact that it would reinvigorate Armenian trade in that city, and would also secure significant revenues for the French treasury from the books trade. Armenian books were widely distributed in the East.<sup>90</sup> On May 6, 1669, Voskan Erevants'i presented a petition in Latin to King Louis XIV, in which he asked him to kindly accept an Armenian Bible printed by him in 1666 in Amsterdam. In the response, dated August 11, 1669, received from the king, it becomes evident that Voskan Erevantsi was granted permission to establish a printing house and to publish books in Armenian in Marseilles and Lyon or any other city of the kingdom.<sup>91</sup> These measures angered the French merchants who viewed the Armenians, as in the past, as competitors. The French commercial circles even went to the extent of asking for the help of Rome's inquisition, as a result of which, the Marseilles printing house was closed down in 1683, after ten years of operation.

The struggle of the French merchant bourgeoisie for the interests of the country was so bizarre that Paris publicly emerged in opposition to Marseilles, whose merchant class had adopted a hostile position against the Armenians *khojas*. Famous Parisian personalities came to the defense of the Armenians. Finally, Louis XIV intervened in the affair. On January 3, and February 5, 1683, he sent to Mocan, his official in Marseilles, two decrees which restored the rights of the printing house.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup>A. Alpojayean, *Patmut'iwn hayots gaght'akanut'ean*, vol. II, p. 200.

<sup>90</sup>Fr. Macler, *Mosaïque Orientales*, p. 62.

<sup>91</sup>"Haykakan tparan i Marseyl," *Bazmavep*, h. KhT', June, 1891, p. 163.

<sup>92</sup>Hakob Anasian, *17-rd dari azatagrakan sharzhumnere Arewmtean Hayastanum [The Seventeenth Century Freedom Movements in Western Armenia]*, (Erevan, 1961), pp. 190-93.

Armeno-French relations gained a new momentum at the end of the seventeenth century. In part this was a consequence of the naval battle of 1693 near Smyrna, in which the French inflicted a devastating defeat on England and Holland. The commercial fleets of these two countries in the Levant were largely destroyed. Thereafter, the French became the rulers in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, a development that had a positive influence on Armenian-French trade-economic relations, which continued successfully into the eighteenth century.

In Western Europe, one of the major commercial partners of the Armenian merchants involved in international trade was Holland. It was the first country in Europe where the bourgeois revolution had occurred, culminating in the first modern republic. After the revolution, in just a few decades, Holland's economic development surpassed that of other European countries, and the rapid growth of trade became especially noticeable.

The Armenian merchants had settled in the cities of Amsterdam and Brugge since the eleventh century. Brugge at that time was an important commercial seaport and was in contact with the Cilician seaport of Ayas. The first Armenian merchants in the region came to the city of Brugge.<sup>93</sup> After the fall of the Cilician Armenian State, some Cilicians took refuge in the Dutch ports.

"In the late fourteenth century (probably 1390)," writes Ghevond Alishan, "Armenians and the Turks were permitted in Bruzh (Brugge) to sell their rugs near St. Donat Church, and later in front of the magnificent Cathedral in Saint Mark's Square in Venice."<sup>94</sup> In the fifteenth century, the Armenians in Holland constituted a considerable number, and had their "National House."

By the end of the fifteenth century, Brugge lost its commercial significance to Amsterdam. The first account of the arrival of the Armenians in Amsterdam was registered in 1560-1565. They visited that city to sell pearls and diamonds, and to purchase Dutch goods for export to the Levantine seaports.<sup>95</sup> It is presumed that a majority

<sup>93</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere* . . . , pp. 10-11.

<sup>94</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 461.

<sup>95</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere* . . . , pp. 45-46.

were merchants from Julfa. Along with them came the Armenian merchants from Asia Minor, and Western Armenia, as well as from Karabagh, Zangezur, the province of Goghtan, Armenian trading villages and towns, specially from Agulis, and other places, where all of them were referred to as "Armenians of Julfa."<sup>96</sup>

In fact, the merchants visiting Amsterdam from Eastern Armenia, dominated by Safavid Iran, and Armenian communities of Iran proper, were registered in customs logs simply as "Christian Persians," and the merchants visiting Holland from Asia Minor and Western Armenia were referred to as either Armenians or Smyrnans. In the late Middle Ages in the European countries, the use of the "generic" name Persian was so widespread that Dutch historians called the Armenian church of Amsterdam, which was built by the Armenians of Julfa, the "Persian" church. The public referred to the Armenians of Julfa and Smyrna as the "Asians".<sup>97</sup>

"In the mid-sixteenth century," observes the author of the history of the Armenian community in Holland, Arakel Sarukhan, "suddenly and unexpectedly, Armenians of Julfa appeared on the scene, and almost simultaneously in all European commercial cities which were in contact with the markets in the Middle East."<sup>98</sup>

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Armenians established regular transportation links with Amsterdam, which already occupied a leading place in the international trade. The presence of Armenian merchants in Amsterdam gained greater momentum after the forced migration of Armenians from Eastern Armenia to Iran. The Dutch historian, Van Emdre, relying on Dutch archival sources, writes that in the seventeenth century, "as a result of the invasion and partial destruction of Armenia by the Persians, they were forced to emigrate. Some of them have come and settled in Amsterdam."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>99</sup>S. Van Embre, *Historisch Berigt van alle de Gezindheden*, (Utrecht, 1784), p. 65.

Those who settled first in Amsterdam, naturally, were unfamiliar with the local language, customs and traditions, and, therefore, needed the assistance of mediator-translators. The Jews who had come there before the Armenians and who dominated the Eastern languages, performed this role. In the city records of 1626, the name of one Isaac Khamays or Khamis has been specifically mentioned.

In 1612, the Ottoman Empire signed a capitulation agreement with Holland. This opened the gates of the Levantine markets for the Netherlanders to conduct free trade.<sup>100</sup> That agreement significantly boosted the trade of the Armenian merchants with Holland, particularly because Dutch ships established regular traffic between the Levantine seaports, especially Smyrna, Constantinople, and the major commercial centers of Holland.

However, shortly thereafter, one Dutch historian wrote: "The majority of the Armenians were educated people, and besides their mother tongue, spoke Italian, and French. They conducted their business with the Dutch in these languages."<sup>101</sup>

Relying on Amsterdam city archival documents, A. Sarukhan notes that beginning in 1617, the Armenian merchants conducted major business transactions in the Amsterdam stock exchange. The most important evidence of this is provided by the Dutch historian R. A. Bekius, who states that on the walls of the stock exchange, besides numerous paintings of foreign merchants, retailers and moneychangers, there were portraits of Armenian merchants.<sup>102</sup> In Amsterdam they also had their own market, which was called the "Eastern market" (Qoster market). The Armenian merchants formed trade companies with the Dutch on the partnership principle, with sharing of stock ownership. They also owned trading houses – in Amsterdam alone in the 1660s there were sixty such trading houses.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup>S. Van Rooy, "Armenian Merchant Habits, as Mirrored in 17-18 Century Amsterdam Documents," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, n.s. p. t.III, 1966, p. 349.

<sup>101</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere . . .*, pp.47-48.

<sup>102</sup>R. A. Bekius, *The Armenian Community in Amsterdam in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Integration and Disintegration*. Paper presented at the 1st Conference of the "Association Internationale d'Etudes Arméniennes", Amsterdam, 1983, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup>*Ocherki istorii Italii*, p. 251.

Among other factors that contributed greatly to the expansion of Armenian trade in Holland, was the commercial and religious freedom that the Armenians enjoyed in that country. While local authorities refused "Amsterdam citizenship" to the Jews who had settled in Amsterdam before the Armenians, the latter were granted citizenship and all the rights entitled by it.<sup>104</sup>

In light of the growing Armenian-Dutch trade, the Armenian community of Amsterdam also grew. The merchants who were doing well brought their families along, and settled there permanently. Many married local women and were registered as citizens.

The Dutch authorities were hospitable towards the Armenian merchants because after being liberated from the yoke of Spain (in 1603 the latter de facto recognized the independence of the Republic of Holland), the Netherlanders experienced major economic growth. Its manufacturing companies, which supplied textiles to almost all of Europe, needed large quantities of raw material (silk, wool, cotton, dyes, etc), a significant portion of which Holland acquired from the Armenian and Greek merchants.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, the Armenian merchants conducting business with Holland were engaged in a large-scale exchange of goods between the Netherlands and other European countries, which was beneficial to the treasury of the state of Holland. In the museum in the city of Livorno in Italy, a document dated November 21, 1627, in Dutch, reveals that six Armenian merchants from Amsterdam agreed with a Dutch ship captain named Jean Steen to transport their goods from Amsterdam to Livorno. In place of signatures on the document are the titles and seals of the merchants, which read: Sarhad, Zakar, Ohan, Markos, Petros and Hovakim.<sup>106</sup>

The trade houses of the Armenian merchants of Venice, Livorno, Marseilles and various other cities of Spain and their branches received from, and sent to, Holland large quantities of commodities. In other

<sup>104</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere*, p. 147.

<sup>105</sup>H. Watjen, *die Niederlander im mittelmeeergebiet zur Zeit ihrer höchsten Machtstellung* Abhande Z. Verkehrs und Seegeschichte, Bd. II, (Berlin, 1909), p. 134.

<sup>106</sup>See A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere* . . .

words, Holland was a transit place for the entire European trade of the Armenian merchants. The khojas exported goods by ships from there to the north, to the coastal cities of the Baltic, and in return imported other goods, especially amber, which was in great demand in the markets of Smyrna.<sup>107</sup>

The partnership and collaboration between the Armenian and Dutch merchants started to expand significantly since the third decade of the seventeenth century,<sup>108</sup> first of all due to the trade agreement, dated 1623, signed between Iran and the Dutch East India Company. This agreement increased considerably the volume of trade with Holland and expanded the sphere of the activities of the Armenian merchants of Iran who at that time had a monopoly over Iran's external trade under the Safavids. Another contributing factor to the development of Armenian-Dutch trade relations was Holland's new dynamic policy in the Middle East. Based on the capitulation agreements of 1598 and 1612, between Holland and the Ottoman Empire, Holland gradually expanded its commercial activities in the Middle East. Its naval fleet appeared in the Mediterranean for the first time in 1617.

By the mid-seventeenth century, Holland had become the main source for supply of Central and Northern European origin goods to the Levantine markets.<sup>109</sup> In the meantime, the cheaper transportation cost by Dutch ships attracted more trade and stipulated their broader use in the Eastern Mediterranean, reaching a point where Dutch ships even delivered goods to London.<sup>110</sup> As a result of these developments, in the mid-seventeenth century, Holland occupied second place in the East Mediterranean trade, next to England.

The Dutch were willing to cooperate with the Armenian merchants not only to acquire the Eastern goods, but also to defeat their French and English competitors. Another reason that the Netherlands was

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>108</sup>H. Dunlop, *Source pour servir à l'histoire de la compagnie des Indes Orientales et La Hay*, p. 74.

<sup>109</sup>H. Castries, *Les Sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc*, t.3, (Paris, 1912), p. 40.

<sup>110</sup>W. Monson, *The Naval Tracts*, (London, 1902-1914), vol. 3, p. 443.



keenly interested in the European trade of the Armenian merchants was because the latter mainly used Dutch ships for the transfer of their goods from the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to the European countries. There is evidence that the Armenians themselves owned vessels which flew the Dutch flag, which they used to transport goods between the Eastern Mediterranean lands and Dutch seaports<sup>111</sup>

As is well known, Anglo-Dutch competition over the international maritime routes in the second half of the seventeenth century culminated in war that ended in Holland's defeat. The military and political power of the Netherlanders was thereby weakened. They lost a number of colonies, and were forced out of the maritime trade. Their trade with the countries in the Middle East was restricted. Naturally, under those circumstances, Dutch cooperation with the Armenian merchants became extremely significant. It is not accidental that in the second half of the seventeenth century, the government of the Netherlands periodically granted new privileges to the Armenian merchants.<sup>112</sup>

In their quest for profitable markets for their goods, the Armenian merchants also penetrated such Western European countries, as Spain, Portugal, England, Germany, Denmark, and Scandinavian.<sup>113</sup>

In Spain, the Armenian merchants often visited the cities of Cadiz and Seville. Zakaria Agulets'i, for example, in his diary mentions that in 1671 he had been to Cadiz on a commercial assignment.<sup>114</sup>

A large number of Armenian merchants also visited Portugal. The first contacts of Armenians with that country date to the late eleventh century, when as a result of the Seljuk invasion, emigration from Armenia gained tragic dimensions. During the three hundred years

<sup>111</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere . . .*, pp.56-57.

<sup>112</sup>Kr. Glamann, *Dutch-Asiatic Trade, 1620-1770*, (Copenhagen-The Hague, 1958).

<sup>113</sup>R. V. Gulbenkian, *Hay-portugalakan haraberut'iwner [Armenian-Portuguese Relations]*, (Erevan, 1986). R. Gulbenkian, "Les relations entre l'Arménie et le Portugal du Moyen Age au 16e siècle," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes*, t. 14, 1980, pp. 171-213. See also *A History of Oriental Carpets Before 1800*, (London, 1896). K. Bayani. *Les relations de l'Iran avec l'Europe occidentale à l'époque Safavide, Portugal, Espagne, Angleterre, Hollande et France [avec le document inédit]*, (Paris, 1937).

<sup>114</sup>Zak'aria Agulets'u *oragrut'iwne*, p. 55.



of its existence (1080-1375), the Armenian state of Cilicia also kept contact with Spain and Portugal. In 1293, at the request of Jaques II of Aragon (1291-1327), the Cilician state granted the merchants of Catalonia a number of trade privileges which exempted them from taxes, permitted them to built storage depots in the Cilician seaport of Ayas, and so on. It also approved that the ruling dynasties of Portugal and Cilician Armenia had kinship relations.<sup>115</sup>

After the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, a large number of Armenian residents of that city emigrated to several countries, including Portugal, where they settled mainly in Miraga.<sup>116</sup>

Later, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Armenians from Iran — primarily the Armenian merchants of Old and New Julfa—settled in Lisbon. Among the most often cited goods imported by them were the Persian rugs.<sup>117</sup>

The 1580 capitulation agreement signed between England and Turkey served as the basis for the revival of the old trade ties of the Armenian merchants with Britain. Following that, English tradesmen and travelers began to visit Armenia. It is known, for example, that in 1581, a traveler named Nipri was in Armenia. And in 1600, another English traveler, John Cartwright, during his expedition to Mesopotamia, Syria, and Iran, also visited Armenia and characterized the Armenians as "extremely diligent people in all spheres of activities."

The Armenian community settled in Amsterdam, a large center of the European trade, expressed unwavering interest in the British Isles. The first sizeable groups of Armenians engaged in the jewelry business and trade moved to England from Amsterdam, and settled in Plymouth. However, in the 1640s, during a turbulent period of England's bourgeois revolution, when Oliver Cromwell demanded that the Armenians clearly state their position regarding their support for the king or himself, the Armenians, fearful and seeking to escape from the threat, returned to Holland.

<sup>115</sup>R. Gulbenkian, *Les relations entre l'Arménie et le Portugal* . . . , pp. 171-216.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 214—16.

<sup>117</sup>H. Kiwrdean, *Gorge hayots' mej [Carpets in Armenia]*, (Venice, 1947), p. 83.

However, as the Armenians later began to play an influential role in India, Iran and England in trade, the English became interested in the Armenian language and culture. Thus, in 1669, E. Katellos published in London a unique dictionary of seven languages, one of which was Armenian.

In 1675, one Hakob Grigorents, traveling to the British Isles, most likely for trade, composed a prose piece "Glory to Britain" in which he expressed his fascination for England.

Although the Mediterranean Sea constituted the main pulse of the Armenian merchants' trade with the West European countries, the land and river routes were no less significant for them and were mainly utilized to travel from one European country to another.

Thus, the Armenian merchants played an extremely important role in the growth of commercial, economic, and cultural relations between East and West Europe.

The Frenchman Pitton de Tournefort has written about the Armenian *khojas*: "They not only were the masters of the Levantine trade, but also to some extent had a similar standing in the trade of major commercial cities of Europe. They come from the interiors of Persia, and settle in Livorno. Not so long ago, they settled in Marseilles. So many of them are in Holland, and England."<sup>118</sup>

The Armenian merchants imported a variety of goods to Europe. The primary merchandise the raw silk. Handicrafts also comprised a significant team of import. Among the goods exported by the Armenian *khojas* of New Julfa to Western Europe were Iranian products, especially knitted products, which were second only to raw silk. It is known that in seventeenth century Iran, *Karkhanes* (small factories) were significantly developed. This fact indicates the increase in the demand for goods for both domestic and foreign consumption. According to the German Adam Olearius, in Isfahan, there were a large number of Armenian weavers, painters, artists, etc, who were engaged in the production of cotton articles and silk, "turning them with great skills into gold-leaf taffetas."<sup>119</sup>

<sup>118</sup>Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un Voyage du Levant*, p. 158.

<sup>119</sup>*Podrobnoe opisaniie puteshestviia . . .*, p. 790.

The sources provide abundant information regarding the goods exported by the Armenian merchants to Western Europe, including camel, goat, and sheep wool; taffetas from Damascus, various spices, waxes, woolen and silk textiles, velvet, ink-nut, resin, garden rhubarb, herb gum, rugs, leatherwear (especially shagreen), hashish, pistachio, safian, furs, Indian musk, cotton, honey wax, pearl, coral, perfumes, wine, special paint from ash, indigo, hell-stone, incense, dried and salted fish, gold, silver, bot date, tobacco, sugar, zafran, honey, rice, and many other things.<sup>120</sup> Other exported goods included jewels and precious stones, which were popular with the luxury-oriented European nobility. Export of jewelry was easy and highly profitable. According to a Jesuit monk, the Armenian merchants were able to evade the Persian and Turkish customs officials, and export precious stones by smuggling them to Europe. According to the same monk, the Armenian merchants sometimes succeeded in smuggling gems worth up to two million francs by hiding them in their pockets.<sup>121</sup>

To facilitate the gem trade of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Armenian merchants even undertook the compilation of special handwritten directories on precious stones.<sup>122</sup>

The role of the Armenian merchants was also significant in the dissemination and familiarization of products unknown in the West, such as foodstuffs, spices, various pharmaceuticals, perfumes and others. Thus, there is information available regarding the use of coffee in Europe, which is reported to have been first introduced by the Armenian merchants.<sup>123</sup>

The Armenian khojas exported from the European countries to the East mainly Dutch, English, German, French cloth, velvet, broadcloth, woolen textiles, woven colorful silk products, golden

<sup>120</sup>M. Mashtots'i anwan Matenadaran, dzer. No. 8443, pp.86-91. Gh. Alishan, Sisakan, pp.445-46.

<sup>121</sup>C. V. Ter-Avetisyan, *Gorod Djuga*, p. 44.

<sup>122</sup>K. Patkanov, *Dragotsennnye kamni, ikh nazvaniia i svoitva po poniatiliam armian v 17 b. [Precious Stones, Their Names and Characteristics in the Concept of Armenians in the 17th Century]*, (Saint Petersburg, 1873). A. Davrizhets'i *Patmut'wn*, pp.586-89.

<sup>123</sup>Jaklin Piren, *Otkrytie Aravii, piat vekov puteshestvii i issledovanii [Discovery of Arabia, Five Centuries of Voyages and Studies]*, (Moscow, 1970), p. 76.

and silver taffetas, amber, chem mercury, various dyes, silver, canvas, various home appliances, guns, glassware, chem lead, needles, cast-iron products, playing cards, various items for decoration, paper, hides, Venetian mirrors, canvas, lace, leather products, clocks, scissors, knives, soap, looking glasses, false pearls, cosmetics, luxury items and other European products.<sup>124</sup>

Dutch historians state that in the seventeenth century, the Armenian merchants comprised the best buyers of Dutch products, especially cloth and woolen textiles.

In his "Introduction to commerce, a most necessary and profitable lesson", a manual written for the Armenian khojas, Kostand Jughayets'i declares that the Armenian merchants engaged in international trade between the East and the West, exported large quantities of amber from Europe to the Eastern countries. "Amber," he writes, "is found in abundance in Europe, particularly in the Sea of Danzig (Baltic Sea). They cut, polish and make rosary beads from it. It is demanded everywhere in the world, even more in India."<sup>125</sup> The Armenian merchants very often traveled to the Baltic countries, especially to purchase amber.<sup>126</sup>

The Armenian merchants were important intermediaries for the transport of gold and valuable goods between Europe and Asia.<sup>127</sup> According to Raphael du Mans, the Armenians of Venice and Livorno exported silver and gold, "entirely in piasters or golden eques"<sup>128</sup> The gold and silver money brought from Europe was imprinted anew into Iranian currency. The Armenian merchants of Julfa, for example, received huge profits from this, which they shared with the Safavid kings.<sup>129</sup> The latter encouraged this business because it was an abundant source of enrichment of the royal treasury, and it improved

<sup>124</sup>Tournefort, *Relation d'un Voyage du Levant*, p. 159. J.B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages...*, p.47

<sup>125</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzet. No. 5994, ev 10a.

<sup>126</sup>N. K. Kryvonos, *Armianskaia koloniia vo Lvove v pervoi polovine 17v. [Armenian Colony in Lvov in the First Half of the 17th Century]*, (Lvov, 1965), p. 147.

<sup>127</sup>K. Poreter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia*, vol. I, (London, 1821), p. 424.

<sup>128</sup>R. du Mans, *Estat de la Perse*, p. 181.

<sup>129</sup>Nasrolah falsafi, *zendegani shah Abbas avval, 1952-1972*, vol.3, p. 260.

the financial status of Iran. Not mentioning the source, A. Alpojachian writes that on returning from Europe, every caravan of the Julfa merchants brought with it to Iran two hundred thousand silver *skudi*.<sup>130</sup>

Shah Abbas I especially encouraged the importation of money from precious metals to Iran by the Armenian *khojas* because the Turco-Iranian wars, and constant conscriptions and internal mutinies created difficult financial conditions for the country. Gold and silver had become rare commodities in Iran. It is true that the Shah attempted to promote gold mining, but since the expenses outweighed the benefits, the plans were abandoned.<sup>131</sup> Shah Abbas I needed large quantities of gold and silver in order to conduct his reforms, hence, the Safavid court tolerated the active participation of the Armenian *khojas* in Iran's economic life.

Iran was not the last stop for the European currency imported by the Armenian merchants. The gold and silver coins were transported to Bandar Shah Abbas and from there to India. In that country, exclusively precious metal coins were demanded for the purchase of local goods. In this regard, Raphael du Mans writes that "Iran is like a caravanserai which has two entrances, one of them is located on the Turkish border from where the flowing silver from the West is imported. . . the other, an exit gate, is Bandar Abbas or Gomrun on the Persian Gulf, from where routes are opened towards India, Surat in particular, that silver depot of the world. . . The wealth of Persia is nothing but the dampness left in the pipe by the flow of water."<sup>132</sup>

Other sources also contain extremely interesting information regarding the promotion of East-West international trade. During a conversation with a European merchant, Khoja Safar of Julfa says that there exist three kinds of Armenian merchants: peddlers-retail merchants-shop owners, who do not leave the country and are engaged in the sale of local products and knitted items; wholesale merchants who provide products for the shops, after acquiring these

<sup>130</sup>Alpojajean, *Patmut'iwn hay gagh't'akanut'ean* . . . , p. 175.

<sup>131</sup>Honv. Art'inean, "Nor Jughayets'i hayerun arewture ZhE darun," *Anahit*, (1908):

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<sup>132</sup>R. du Mans, *Estat de la Perse* . . . , pp. 193-94.

from larger scale merchants; and finally, major merchants involved in international trade—khojas—who trade with the European countries, "country of urums," (Turkey), and with India, Arabia, Africa.<sup>133</sup>

The geographical span covered by the Armenian merchants was vast. Historian Grigor Daranaght's'i writes that the Armenian merchants "were dispersed in every corner of the world, in India, Ethiopia, Egypt, entire Europe, Constantinople, all of Phrygia, and Moscow, Georgia, territories of the Turks, Kurds, Chaldeans, all of Iran, in the East all the way to China, and England, the land of Tatars, and Abkhazs, and up to the lands unknown."<sup>134</sup>

Kostand Jughayets'i provides an exhaustive list of the names of the countries and cities which the Armenian merchants visited. These were: Iran, Transcaucasus, Central Asia (Bal, Bukhara or "Uzbekistan", Afghanistan (Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul), India (Peshavar, Kashmir, and so forth), Arabia or "Arabestan" (Basra, Baghdad, Aleppo, Mosul), Ethiopia. Among the cities under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire, frequently cited ones are: Constantinople, Bursa, Atrana (Adana), Izmir (Smyrna), Tokhat, Erzerum (Karin), etc. According to Kostand Jughayets'i, the representatives of the Armenian khoja capital in Europe frequented the following trade centers: Alikorna (Livorno), Venice, Genoa, Mesina, Marseilles, Amsterdam, Danzig (Gdansk) and Moscow. Among the European countries cited by him are: Frankstan (France), Enkleter (England), Alaman (Germany), Spain, Poland, Majařstan (Hungary). It is also mentioned that the Armenian khojas crossed the Atlantic and reached the New World (*Yenki Dunya*).<sup>135</sup>

In the seventeenth century, Africa was not an unknown geographical entity for the Armenian merchants. It is true that we do not have rich documentary evidence at our disposal regarding the trade conducted by the Armenian merchants with the African continent. However, the bits and pieces available reveal that the Armenian

<sup>133</sup>C. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Gorod Djuga*, p. 37.

<sup>134</sup>Gr. Daranaght's'i, *Zhamanakagrut'iwn*, pp. 457-58.

<sup>135</sup>N. K. Kryvonos, *Armianskaia koloniia . . .*, pp. 3a-3b.



merchants engaged in the international trade also visited various countries in Africa, especially Ethiopia (Habeshstan) and the countries of Maghreb (North Africa).

It is documented, for example, that between 1682-1704, Avetik Baghdasarean of Tigranakert visited Ethiopia, Nubia, Sudan, and the present territory of the Chad Republic, and from there, crossed the Sahara to the northern parts of Africa, and reached Gibraltar.<sup>136</sup>

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of the white-skinned people, only the Armenians and Greeks were granted permission to enter Ethiopia. Therefore, almost all the Europeans visiting Ethiopia wore the Armenian or Greek dress and pretended to be Armenian or Greek.<sup>137</sup> Ghevond Alishan has referred to two such Catholic travelers, Melkon Silvos and Petros Payiz, who traveled disguised as Armenians.<sup>138</sup> The Capucinian clerics also acted similarly (1638), and later, during the time of Pope Alexander VII (1655-1667), the Franciscans, and others followed suit.<sup>139</sup>

This limited access was due to the religious turmoil from 1632, when Ethiopia "indefinitely" expelled the Latin missionaries and closed its doors to the Europeans.<sup>140</sup>

The renowned Russian historian, B. Turayev, rightly states: "Armenians for centuries on have emerged in Ethiopia as representatives of various spheres of activities in both secular and religious domains."<sup>141</sup>

Of course, the leading Armenian merchants in the international trade were always those of New Julfa. H. Ter Hovhaneants mentions with pride: "It is not an exaggeration to say that at that time Armenian merchants of New Julfa were ahead of all merchants of the world."<sup>142</sup>

<sup>136</sup>See Avetik Baghdasarean, "Tigranaketts'woy ughegrut'iwne," [Travel Account of a Tigranakert Armenian], *Bazmavep*, no.10, 1897.

<sup>137</sup>A. G. Abrahamean, *Hamarot urwagits hay gagh'avayreri . . .*, vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>138</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 471.

<sup>139</sup>A. Alpoyajejan, *Hay episkoposi me araketut'iwne i Hapeshistan ZhE darun* [Mission of an Armenian Bishop in Ethiopia in the 17th Century], (Cairo, 1946), p. 87-8.

<sup>140</sup>P. Rocco da Cesinale, *Storia delle Missioni del Cappuccini*, tomo III, (Roma, 1873), pp. 397-98.

<sup>141</sup>V. A. Turaev, *Iz istorii armiano-abissinskikh otnoshenii* [From the History of Armenian-Ethiopian Relations], (S. Peterburg, 1912), p. 5.

<sup>142</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, p. 172.



However, the role of the "khoja capital" in Armenian history has not been restricted to trade only.

The trade stations of the Armenian khojas in the major centers of Europe and Asia "did not only serve trade interests, rather, often they constituted intellectual centers as well." Along with trade, on the paths of migration, once in a while there also appeared a literate Armenian imbued with a passion for learning.<sup>143</sup>

Along with the dissemination of new products of the European capitalist economy to the countries of the East, the Armenian merchants also played an extremely important role in bringing the European cultural values to the East. Through them, the first books published in Europe came in the East, and they also brought European painting, theatre, and trade to the Eastern countries. The first publishing houses in Turkey and Iran were set up by the Armenian merchants.

"Globe-trotting khojas," writes Leo, during their incessant contacts with different cultures and various state institutions, did not remain indifferent towards the things they observed or heard, particularly in Western Europe. The merchants by trait were the disseminators of material culture among nations. They performed the role of this disseminator of Western civilization among the Eastern nations.<sup>144</sup> "Interacting with various nations, Armenian merchants acquired not only wealth, but also experience, and worldview. An Armenian merchant took to his house from Europe not only clocks, mirrors, velvet, pearls, cloth and fine canvasses, but also ideas."<sup>145</sup>

The role of the Armenian khojas was specially significant in the printing of books. With their efforts or sponsorship during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, numerous religious and secular books, business directories and geographical maps, were published in Amsterdam, Marseille, Venice and other European cities. "Leaving the monastery and church environment, books and literature begin to interest the layman reader, the public, upper and middle classes,

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<sup>143</sup>Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, 5-rd hator, p. 153.

<sup>144</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>145</sup>Leo, *Erkezi zhoghoratsu*, 3-rd hator, p.152.

and create certain preconditions for the future national cultural evolution of the Armenians."<sup>146</sup>

However, despite all this, there was also a negative role that the Armenian merchants played in the political consolidation of the Armenian nation. In the unending search for new markets, the merchant class distanced itself from its ancestral land, and settled in different countries. The merchants were followed by others, who went in large numbers and established themselves in various West European communities, and where they eventually got assimilated and disappeared. This phenomenon gained momentum through the exaggerated stories which the Armenian merchants related about the "freedom" and "material welfare" in the western European countries.

Of course, it was not only the quest for profit that uprooted the Armenians and drove them out of their fatherland. The unstable political situation in Armenia, the absence of security of life and property, the uninterrupted Turco-Iranian wars, generally fought on the territory of Armenia, and a host of other factors forced the Armenian merchants to look for refuge in Europe, especially in places where they were received with open arms. For the capitalist societies of Europe greatly benefited from the commercial and economic activities of the Armenian merchants, who contributed significantly to the accumulation of capital and expansion of currency circulation in these societies.

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<sup>146</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner hay azatagrakan...*, pp. 59-60.

## The Iranian-Armenian Khojas' Trade with Russia and Eastern European Countries in the Seventeenth Century

The acquaintance of the Armenians with Russia dates far back to the time when the Russian nation and its statehood was taking shape during the Riurikovichs' rule, with Kiev as the capital.

In 1480, the Russian state shed the Tatar-Mongol yoke. That development was a turning point with historic repercussions for Russia. In the 1680s, the consolidation of the Russian territories under the Principality of Moscow was completed. A centralized Russian state was being formed which overtly expressed its intention to expand towards the south, annexing not only the remnants of the Tatar-Mongol rule, but also expanding towards the Black and Caspian Seas. This would allow the Russians access to the trade-economic routes of the Middle East and Near East, as well as Central Asia, and establish direct contacts with India and China.

The conquest of the Khanates of Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556) by Ivan IV had immense economic and political significance for Russia. First, the Russian government obtained the most important "pulse" of the eastern trade—the Volga River. Then, it established direct contact with the Khanates of Caucasus, Iran, and the Middle East, and began an active campaign for the control of the international trade routes crossing Iran and Transcaucasus.

It is well known that the trade routes for the raw silk destined for Europe passed through Iran and Transcaucasus. The conquest of Astrakhan allowed Russia to gain access to the Caspian Sea by which it could also control the traffic in the area. It helped Russian kings to monitor the European powers' political and economic ties with the Trans-Caspian and Near Caspian regions, Transcaucasus and India. Thus, Russia entered the competition over the international trade routes passing through Iran and Transcaucasus.<sup>1</sup>

The Ottoman Empire viewed this multifaceted policy of Russia as a direct threat to its economic and political interests. First, the policy threatened the customs revenues, which were generated from the transit trade conducted from Iran over Turkish territory, heading for the Levant. Second, with the presence of Russia in Astrakhan, an invincible barrier was being erected in Transcaucasus, Iran and the Near Caspian region, blocking the expansionistic policies of the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of the latter was to circumvent the boundaries of the Moscovian State from Dnepr to the Urals.<sup>2</sup>

The Ottoman Empire's main concern was that a convergence of interests between the Safavid Iran and Russia could culminate in an anti-Turkish treaty. The Ottomans also feared that the establishment of direct trade ties between Iran and Russia could force out the Turkish caravan transit route crossing Asia Minor, to the benefit of the shorter Volga-Caspian trade route.

Undoubtedly, all these developments brought about a decisive reaction by the Ottoman Empire towards Russia's attempt to move south. In the light of this fact, it is not surprising that during the entire period of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, in the continuous wars staged against the rival Safavid Iran, the Turkish military victories were also viewed as a means for halting Russia's expansion toward the South. In Istanbul, the existing close ties and affinity of the Near-

<sup>1</sup>P. P. Bushev, *Posolstvo Artemiya Volinskogo [Diplomatic Mission of Artemiy Volinskiy]*, (Moscow, 1973), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>P. P. Bushev, *Istoriia posolstv i diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii russkogo i iranskogo gosudarstv v 1586-1612gg. [History of Missions and Diplomatic Relations of Russian and Iranian States in 1586-1612]*, (Moscow, 1976), pp. 45, 46.

Volgan and the Crimean Tatars, as well as the Caucasian Mountaineers and the Sunni Muslims of the region with Turkey, were viewed as the guarantor of this plan.

With the intention of disrupting the advance of the gradually strengthening Russian state toward the south, serious measures were adopted, especially in the sixteenth century. Thus, in 1569, Sultan Selim II (1566-1574), with the help of the Khan of the Crimea, attempted to take over Astrakhan, and create an insurmountable buffer between Moscow, Iran, and the Transcaucasus. However, the Turkish-Tatar armies had a narrow escape from the vicinity of Astrakhan. In 1578, the war with Iran was resumed. Sultan Murad III (1574-1595) attempted to take over the Transcaucasus and Caspian Sea coast in order to gain control of the Volga-Caspian route. It is important to note that in that operation, not only the Crimean Khan, but also the feudals of Daghestan, Shaki, and Shirvan, and the Sunni merchants, spared no efforts in ensuing the success of the Turks.

However, all the efforts of the Ottomans to sabotage the commercial-economic relations, and the newly formed political ties between Iran and Russia proved futile. Though the Russo-Iranian trade relations in the sixteenth century were not yet firmly established, the emergence of the Armenian merchants as trade intermediaries was significant.

The Armenian had been conducting business with the Moscow government much before the latter gained control of the Volga-Caspian main route. The Armenians had known the Volga route since ancient times. As early as the first century BC, the Armenians and the Medes transported Mesopotamian goods over land to the northern regions of the Caspian Sea.<sup>3</sup> During the reign of Ivan III, Armeno-Russian relations were remarkably reinvigorated. Subsequent to Russia's solidifying its rule in Kazan and Astrakhan, stable conditions were created for the expansion of trade between Russia and the Armenian

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<sup>3</sup>V. V. Bartold, "Arabskie izvestiia o rusakh," [Arab Sources on the Ruses], *Sovetskoe vostokovedenie*, vol. 1 (1940), p. 16.



merchants. And during the Russian campaigns against the Tatar principalities, the Armenians constituted sincere supporters of the Russians. The Kazan chronology, for example, informs us that among those welcoming the returning victorious Tsar and his armies to Moscow were numerous Armenians.<sup>4</sup> In memory of this victory, Ivan the Terrible ordered the construction of St. Vasily (Basil) the Blessed cathedral in the center of Moscow, one of the towers-churches (north-west church) dedicated to Gregory the Illuminator of the Armenians. In this regards, L. Khachikian claims that this was due to the Armenians of Moscow having an influential role in the economic life of Russia.<sup>5</sup> In other words, he feels that the Tsar was attempting to win the hearts of the Armenians.

Ivan the Terrible's conquest of the Kazan Khanate and Astrakhan as well as the acceptance by the Siberian Khans and Princes of Noghay of Russian rule had other ramifications. The entire Volga route came under Russian control, and thus the road connecting the Volga and the Caspian Sea was opened. Immediately after this, the Beglarbeks of Shamakhi and Shirvan sent envoys to Moscow, asking for the re-establishment of the ancient commercial rights of the Armenian merchants in the Russian state, and resumption of trade with Russia over Astrakhan. Ivan IV granted their requests.<sup>6</sup>

Beginning from this period, the Armenian merchants begin to visit Russia not only from Iran and India, but also from Holland, Italy, the Levant, the Crimea, as well as Western Armenia. In 1555, the Venetian ambassador, Fr. Diabolo, visiting Russia, for example, stated that many Armenian merchants visited Moscow, Kazan, and Novgorod, bringing with them a variety of Eastern goods.<sup>7</sup> The Genoese Paul Iyovi, who visited Astrakhan in 1567 noted that the Eastern merchants, Armenians in particular, conducted large scale trade in that city.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>*Kazanskaia istoriia* [History of Kazan], (Moscow, 1957), p. 154; L. S. Khachikian, "Hayere hin Moskvayum ew Moskwa tanogh chanaparhneri vray," *Banber Matenadaran* [The Armenians in Old Moscow and on the Routes to Moscow], h. 13 Erevan (1980), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>*Istoricheskoe opisaniie drevnego Rossiyskogo muzeia* [Historical Description of the Ancient Russian Museum], (Moscow, 1807), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Gh. Alishan, Sisakan, p. 464.

<sup>8</sup>*Biblioteka inostrannikh pisatelei o Rosii* [Library of Foreign Writers on Russia], vol. 1, (S. Petersburg, 1836), p. 35.



Also, available sources note that one Hakob the Armenian, was the owner of a thirty-five ton capacity vessel in operation in the Caspian Sea. Also, an Armenian village near the Nizabad seaport of the Caspian Sea was incorporated in trade.<sup>9</sup> The number of Armenian merchants arriving in Novgorod increased to such an extent that a proclamation issued in 1486 decreed the amount of taxes to be collected from the Litvenians, Turks and Armenians.<sup>10</sup> The presence of the so called "Armenian House" or "Armenian Caravan House" where Persian merchants also stopped, testifies to the significant trade conducted by the Armenian merchants in Russia.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Russian government had restricted the areas of the activity of the Eastern merchants, the goods imported from the East were widely distributed throughout Russia. The Russian merchants obtained these goods from the Armenians and sold them not only in the central cities of Russia, but also in the furthest Northern and Northeastern regions. "This fact, writes M. Fekhner, effectively confirms the significance of the Eastern goods for domestic Russian markets."<sup>12</sup>

The main commodities of trade of the Armenian merchants in the sixteenth century were raw and refined silk. However, they also traded in other goods, such as precious stones, furs, leather, and wax, in large quantities.

Astrakhan, where the exchange of goods took place on the crossroads connecting North and South, occupied a special place in the trade relations between Russia and the Armenians. The Armenian merchants also gained special significance in the cities of Shamakhi, Astrakhan, Kazan, Arkhangelsk, Tver, and Novgorod, and then the Black Sea and Baltic Seas<sup>13</sup>. Until the conquest of Astrakhan by the

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<sup>9</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegru t'ivnner*, pp. 442-44.

<sup>10</sup>M. V. Fekhner, *Torgovlia russkogo gosudarstva so stranami Vostoka v 16 veke* [Trade of the Russian State with the Countries of the East], (Moscow, 1952), p. 61.

<sup>11</sup>N. Kostomarov, *Ocherk torgovli Moskovskogo gosudarstva v 16-17 stoletiiakh* [Sketches of the Trade of the Russian State in the 16th-17th Centuries], (S. Peterburg, 1889), p. 86.

<sup>12</sup>M. V. Fekhner, *Torgovlia russkogo gosudarstva*. . . , pp. 60-63.

<sup>13</sup>A. Hovhannisean, *Drvagner* . . . , p. 440.

Russians, the Armenian and Persian merchants brought goods to that town from Iran, Bukhara, Khiva, and India.<sup>14</sup>

Until the extension of the tsarist regime in both the north and the south in the sixteenth century, the Western European countries had been able to establish trade relations, through the North Sea and Volga-Caspian route with the countries located in the south of Iran and with Russia itself. In the seventh decade of the fifteenth century, the ambassadors, Contarini and Barbaron, of the Republic of Venice in Iran, had paid attention to that road.

Then, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Austrian Baron Sigizmund Herberstein in his "Text on the Moscovian Affairs" emphasized the significance of that route for the Western European states' commerce with the East.<sup>15</sup> However, the English, having realized first the commercial and economic significance of the road in the 1550s organized an expedition headed by Chansler and created direct maritime connection with the West. The discovery of the Northern route through the Baltic Sea was such an important development that the English compared it with the sea route leading to India discovered by the Portuguese. The granting of commercial rights to the so-called "English Muscovy Company" contributed to the unprecedented expansion of commercial and economic ties between the West and Russia.<sup>16</sup>

After the "opening" of the "Northern Route," almost all the developed European countries made fervent efforts to acquire the monopoly of conducting trade with Iran over Russian territory. The Western European countries took great interest in the Russian transit route in the second half of the sixteenth century because the routes to penetrate the Iranian market were extremely limited. The Levantine

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<sup>14</sup>N. Kostomarov, *Ocherk torgovli Moskovskogo gosudarstva...*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>See "Rerum Moscoviticarum commentarii," sowie "Moskowiter Wunderbare Historien," (Basel, 1967).

<sup>16</sup>T. S. Willan, *The Early History of the Russia Company, 1553-1603*, (Manchester, 1968), pp. 58-59.

road was considered the monopoly of the Venetian and other Italian republics, and the Portuguese dominated the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. In pursuit of their colonial policies, the Volga-Caspian road interested England and Holland not only as a means to penetrate Iran, but to dominate the international trade routes crossing through that country.

Besides that, the Volga-Caspian road was much shorter than the Turkish land transit route or the sea route circling around Africa. According to the figures provided by the Swede Kilburger, the oceanic route from England to the Persian Gulf took about one and half years, with no guarantees about the outcome of the journey. But a trip over the Finnish Sea and Volga-Caspian route from Holland to Iran lasted only seven to eight months. Kilburger concluded that the Iranian trade through the latter route, was the most feasible and least dangerous one.<sup>17</sup> Another important advantage of that road was that the merchants crossing the huge Arkhangelsk-Astrakhan road paid customs duty of only ten per cent on the goods in Arkhangelsk and five per cent in Moscow.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the Volga-Caspian route had its disadvantages. First, winter created many difficulties. Also, it was extremely dangerous to navigate the Caspian Sea with primitive ships. Besides, on the lower currents of the Volga, the Noghay bandits and the Cossacks would ambush the merchants.

During the second half of the sixteenth century and the entire seventeenth century, almost all the European states were in fierce competition to obtain a monopoly of transporting their goods to Iran through the Volga-Caspian route of Russia. The two powerful states

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<sup>17</sup>B. G. Kurts, *Sochineniye Kilburgera o russkoi torgovle v tsarstvovanie Alekseya Mikhailovicha* [Writings of Kilburger on the Russian Trade During the Reign of Aleksey Mikhailovich], (Kiev, 1915), p. 149.

<sup>18</sup>Ghukas Vanandets'i, *Banali hamataratsi ashkharhats'uts'in meroy noratsni*, p. 38-41.

of England and Holland, having entered the phase of capitalist development, were especially engaged in this competition.<sup>19</sup>

However, with a few short-term exceptions, all the efforts of the European states met with failure, because the Tsarist government persistently restricted European interaction in Russia. The Tsarist court believed that the free trade activities of the economically powerful Western European countries in Russia would unavoidably weaken Russia's already feeble trade capital and as a result make it dependent on the well-organized foreign-based trade companies. Similarly, the Russian merchants took a hostile stance towards foreign companies and trade capital. Since economic competition was not possible the only option was to rely on the feudal state apparatus, and conduct a protectionist policy.

While restricting the Western European countries trade with Iran, Moscow tried to establish its own commercial and political relations with the latter.

The initiative to establish official diplomatic ties between the Safavid Kingdom and Russia came from Moscow. In 1586, Russia dispatched a delegation to Iran for laying the beginnings of a firm commercial relationship between the two countries. By the end of the century, the exchange of ambassadors became more regular.<sup>20</sup>

Also, during these Russo-Iranian negotiations, the two partners discussed the issue of signing an offensive-defensive military-political treaty against their common enemy, Turkey.

Russia also made vigorous diplomatic efforts to sign a military-political treaty with Iran and began to penetrate into the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region. In May 1595, having successfully concluded its war against Sweden, with the intention of entering the Baltic Sea, the Russian government strengthened its struggle against

<sup>19</sup>S. I. "Arkhangelskii, Anglo-gollandskaia torgovlia s Moskvoi v 17 v." [Anglo-Dutch Trade with Moscow in the 17th Century], *Istoricheskii sbornik* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1936), no. 5, pp. 13-14. Doneseniia poslannikov respubliki Soedinennykh Niderlandov pri russkom dvore," [Reports of the Envoys of the Republic of United Netherlands at the Russian Court], *Sbornik Imperatorskogo obshestva*, T. 116, (S. Petersburg, 1902), p. CLXXIII.

<sup>20</sup>See P. P. Bushev, *Istoriia posolstv i diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii russkogo i iranskogo gosudarstv v 1586-1612gg.*

Turkey's vassal Khans in the Crimea. After the upheavals of the 1603-1612 peasant wars, and the anarchy, which resulted from the Polish and Swedish interventions in Russia, the Russian government affirmed its ties with the countries of the East. The desire to turn Russia into a great nation gained momentum in the political thinking of the Russian statesmen, and drove them not only to launch a struggle to gain access to Europe via a sea route, but also to take the first steps to penetrate the boundless markets of the East. Whereas in Europe, the newly formed Russian merchant capital faced the opposition of the organized, wealthy, and powerful trade companies, in the East the arena seemed to be free. It was no accident that the thoughtful and circumspect Russian merchant, Fedot Kotov, visited Iran in 1623-1624, and expressed interest in everything: commercial centers, trade routes from the Russian state to Iran, and from there to India, China, and so forth, foreign countries' merchants and their trade activities in Iran, the manufacturing centers of raw silk, the country's accommodations, and finally, the customs of the Persians, etc.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the Iranian side, led by Shah Abbas I, who had signed a costly peace treaty with Turkey in March 1590, was feverishly preparing to begin a new war against it. Shah Abbas, to protect Iran's vital interest against his implacable enemy, signed a military-political treaty with the Russian state. This position seems entirely logical when we remember that in the last decade of the sixteenth century, the Shah had dispatched delegations to the European countries, and those countries in particular which were threatened by the invasions of the Turks, and Crimean Khans.<sup>22</sup> During the course of these negotiations, the Shah extensively used Armenian negotiators. Shah Abbas I also tried to enlist allies from among the Western European countries, making no effort to seek an alliance with Russia

<sup>21</sup>*Khozhdenie kuptsa Fedota Kotova v Persiyu*, [Travel of Merchant Fedot Kotov to Persia] (Moscow, 1958).

<sup>22</sup>V. A. Baibourtian, *Posrednicheskaya rol novodzhulfinskikh kuptsov v diplomaticheskikh otnosheniakh Irana s zapadnoevropeiskimi stranami v nachale 17 v.*, [Intermediary Role of New Julfa Merchants in the Diplomatic Relations of Iran with Western European Countries at the Beginning of the 17th Century], *Kratkie so'obsheniia Instituta Narodov Azii AN SSSR*, no.77 (1964).



which on this issue, in particular, could have been Iran's natural ally. The Russian Iranologist, P. P. Bushev, writes: "As the study of archival sources indicates, a military alliance against the Turks was never brought up in the diplomatic discourse between Moscow and Shah Abbas I." Perhaps the only exception occurred in late 1611, when the Shah sent a delegation comprising Tadeus, a Carmelite order member, accompanied by two Armenian merchants, to visit Russia and Poland, and convince the monarchs of both countries to conduct a joint struggle against Turkey. However, this delegation not only did not accomplish its goal, it contributed to the severance of Russo-Iranian relations. Assuming that the delegation was headed to Moscow with ill intentions, "voyevod" I. Khvorostinin of Astrakhan imprisoned the members of the delegation. After three years in prison, the Armenian merchants manage to escape and tell Shah Abbas about their ordeal. The latter demanded that the "voyevod" free the delegation members, and threatened to appear in Astrakhan with an entire army if he did not comply. However, with the mediation of Marina Mnishek, Tadeus, and his companions were freed in 1614 and returned to Isfahan.<sup>23</sup>

Why did the Shah's government keep Russia out of an alliance against Turkey? The following were the most important reasons: the relentless southward advance of Russia, and its growing interests in those regions, which were considered by the Safavids as being in the Iranian zone of influence. This caused concern to Shah Abbas I and his successors. Furthermore, there were many commonalities between their fears, and the Turkish crises. In this regard, there was an unusual convergence of interests between the two rivals. These issues were covertly yet persistently followed up from time to time during their negotiations.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the Shah's government feared that Russia's influence would expand to Daghestan, from where the Russians would immediately establish ties with the co-religionist nations of Georgia and Armenia. It is a known fact that in 1605 Shah Abbas I began an

<sup>23</sup>A *Chronicle of the Carmelites in . . .*, vol.1, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup>See K. Bayani, *Les relations de l'Iran avec l'Europe occidentale à l'époque Safavide, Portugal, Espagne, Angleterre, Hollande et France* [avec le document inédit], (Paris, 1937).



armed struggle to neutralize Russia's influence in Eastern Georgia by turning it into an Islamic khanate. The Georgian question, hereafter, became one of the principal issues of the Russo-Iranian conflict.

From this perspective, it is no accident that Shah Abbas I, who persistently tried to divert Iran's foreign trade route from the land routes of Turkey, sought to hit the rival's economy. This, was to relieve Iran of its dependency on Turkey, and it never tried to take advantage of the Volga-Caspian route, exclusively concentrating on the Persian Gulf sea route.<sup>25</sup>

Russo-Iranian political relations during the reign of Shah Abbas I were not beneficial. Their trade-economic relations did not expand. In this sphere, the Armenian merchant *khojas* of Julfa complete connecting link and their visits to Russia prevented the complex disruption of Russo-Iranian commercial ties.

From the Russian archival sources we learn that in the spring of 1626, a group of Armenian merchants visited Moscow, bringing with them varieties of Eastern goods.<sup>26</sup> One can assume that there was other evidence of trade relations. Unfortunately, all documents dated before 1626 were destroyed in a Moscow fire which occurred in the same year. Thus, there is limited information regarding Russian-Armenian relations of the first quarter of the seventeenth century. But it is certain that the trade ties of the Armenians with Russia continued. In this regard, the Russian court expressed interest primarily in the sale and purchase of raw silk whose monopoly the treasury held, and from which it received huge profits.

During that time, the Western Armenian merchants, especially those of Tokhat, had close economic relations with Moscow, despite the fact that at the end of the sixteenth century, and in early the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire was in turmoil due to the massive revolt by the Jalalis. As a result, the major commercial and manufacturing centres of Asia Minor were plundered and looted.

<sup>25</sup>L. L. Bellan, *Shah Abbas, Sa vie, Son histoire*, (Paris, 1932).

<sup>26</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v 17 v.; sbornik dokumentov*, [Armenian-Russian Relations in the 17th Century, Collection of Documents, vol. 1, (Erevan, 1953), pp. 3-4.

The Armenian merchants imported to Russia from Turkey mainly olive oil, tropical fruits, honey wax, coffee, and various Eastern luxury related items, especially silverware. From Russia, they exported to Turkey grain, leatherware, furs, ironware, and so forth.

The Western Armenian merchants conducted their trade with Russia through both land routes and waterways. Beginning in Constantinople, this water route passed through Sinop-Kaffa-Azov, and from there via the Don and Oka rivers to Moscow. The following comprised the land caravan route from Constantinople to Moscow: Adrianapolis-Akk'erman-Ochakov-Perekop-Putyul-Seversk-Novgorod-Briansk-Brin-Kaluga-Moscow. There were other routes, for example, via Tula, Lyuni and Valoyki leading to Azov or Moscow-Chernigov-Kiev-Dnepr-Black Sea-Constantinople route, which, were not significant for their commercial-economic role, and therefore, were used less.

In the transit trade between Russia and Turkey, the Armenian merchants of the Crimea and Kaffa in particular played the role of intermediary merchants.

As Moscow emerged as the capital of Russia, the number of Armenian merchants and those of other professions residing there gradually increased, the majority established permanent residence in Moscow and engaged primarily in trade. In contrast to earlier times, most of these merchants were neither Crimean-Armenians nor from other Armenian provinces under Turkish rule. Rather, they were those who had moved from the South Caucasian Khanates of Eastern Armenia and Georgia, under the Iranian rule.<sup>27</sup>

However, despite all this, Armenian-Russian commercial relations in the first half of the seventeenth century did not grow because of the ebbs in the political relations between Iran and Russia. In fact, the successors of Shah Abbas I did not continue their negotiations for a military alliance with the European powers against Turkey, unlike the persistence of the efforts of their predecessor. They were evidently

<sup>27</sup>L. S. Khach'ikian, "Hayere hin Moskwayum ew Moskwa tanogh chanaparhneri vray," p. 86.

disappointed with the results of these efforts. The Iranian court realized that because of the religious and political crisis in Europe and numerous existing disagreements, the possibilities of signing such a treaty were nil. In addition, the major European powers, because of their commercial interests very often manifested in Near East Turkophilic tendencies.<sup>28</sup> Isfahan was aware that the Western powers' policy was aimed at diverting Turkey's attention from the European affairs through the prolonged Turco-Iranian wars and at weakening the Ottoman Empire with the help of the military forces of the Asian countries, primarily those of Iran.

These factors and other local conditions forced the Shah's government to sign a peace treaty with Ottoman Turkey in 1639, at Zohab. This treaty settled a number of disputed issues between the two states, leading to peace which was not disrupted for an entire century. The treaty of Zohab introduced essential changes in the foreign policy of Safavid Iran. First, for a while it removed the necessity of signing an anti-Turkish treaty with the European states. Thus, the treaty allowed the Safavid government to adopt a harsh policy toward Russia, in response to the latter's active policies in the Caucasus. Indeed, with the signing of the treaty in 1639, Iran no longer concealed its hostility towards Russia. Thus, to keep its domination in the Caucasus, Iran even launched a military offensive against Russia. In its turn, the Russian government expressed its displeasure towards the Safavid government. Both sides, seemed headed towards a collision, which, for some time, disrupted commercial-diplomatic relations.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this, the Armenian merchants continued their trade with Russia serving, as earlier, as mediators in Russo-Iranian trade. On March 14, 1647, I. Tavakalian appealed to Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich for a license to conduct free trade in Russia.<sup>30</sup> According to H. Ter

<sup>28</sup> p.14.

<sup>29</sup>E. S. Zevakin, "Konflikt Rosii v seredine 17 stoletia," *Azerbaidzhan v nachale 18v.*, [Conflict of Russia in the Middle of the 17th Century; Azerbaijan at the Beginning of the 18th Century], (Baku, 1929).

<sup>30</sup>Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v 17 v., *Sbornik dokumentov ...*, pp. 8-10.

Hovhaneants "Tavakalians or Avak'alian were one of the prominent families of Julfa who visited Russia on several occasions for the purposes of trade. In 1647, they received a decree from the tsar which permitted them to conduct business exempt of any taxes."<sup>31</sup>

Relations between Iran and Russia remained tense until the sixth decade of the seventeenth century. Iran sustained more losses than Russia from this situation. The resulting economic damage for the Safavid regime was considerable at a time when it was ridden with unending internal conflicts and dissension among the feudal lords. Hence, the Safavids were ready to compromise, and to make the first move in normalization of their relations with Russia. In 1658, they sent to Moscow a delegation headed by Dakul Sultan Khan. During the negotiations, it became clear that Russia was improving its relations with Iran for economic and political motives, while Iran was interested only in securing active trade relations, with no intention of revoking its 1639 peace treaty with Turkey. Furthermore, Russia had always been considered a potential enemy in the Iranian court, often regarded as more dangerous than Turkey, because Russia's Caucasian policy was always portrayed in Persian minds as a threat.

During this period, one of the main objectives of Russia's Caucasian policy was the creation of a military buffer in that territory against Turkey. The Russian political circles found that in order to accomplish that objective, they needed to tie up Armenian merchant capital through the Transcaucasus with Russia.<sup>32</sup> In addition, in the mid-seventeenth century, the Russian government adopted a mercantilist program, a component of which was the strengthening of foreign trade. With this objective, Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich dispatched various delegations to the Eastern countries, i.e., Iran, China, India, etc.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup>H. Ter-Hovhaneants', *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup>V. Oskanian, *Hay-rusakakan haraberut'iwnnere XVIII darum*, [Armenian-Russian Relations in the 18th Century], *Teghekagir HSSH GA hasarakakan gitut'iwneri*, no.1 (1948), p. 63.

<sup>33</sup>P. P. Smirnov, *Ekonomicheskaja politika Moskovskogo gosudarstva v 17 v.*, [Economic Policy of the Moscovite State in the 17th Century], (Kiev, 1912): 14-15.



Thus, Shah Abbas II (1642-1666) attempted to separate the political and commercial spheres in the relations with Russia. He avoided normalizing Iran's relations with Russia through official channels, that is, by sending ambassadors, and instead adopted the approach which had been used on many occasions by his grandfather and father, Shah Abbas I, and Shah Safi, respectively—using the Armenian merchants as diplomatic emissaries and negotiators. This approach, in the period mentioned above, could have been extremely productive especially since the Armenian merchants of New Julfa, the representatives of the merchant bourgeoisie, were deeply interested in the Russian market and the transit routes crossing Russia.

In 1660, Khoja Zakar Shahrmanian, a representative of the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company, arrived in Moscow from Isfahan. He was the son of Sarhad Sahrmanian, one of the prominent members of the Julfa Armenian khoja class. Nine renowned merchants accompanied him. Zakar Shahrmanian presented to Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich the famous "diamond throne," made by the Armenian master artisans, and many other valuable gifts, among them Julfa Armenian painter Tanghriveran's (later, after moving to Moscow in the Russian circles he was known by the name of Ivan or Bogdan Saltanov) painting, "Mystical Supper."<sup>34</sup> In fact, donating gifts to the Tsar in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries was considered a special way of conducting business. However, in this case, by presenting the valuable gifts, the representatives of the Julfa Armenian Trade Company were manifesting the company's great capabilities. In Moscow, negotiations took place between high level governmental officials and Zakar Shahrmanian regarding the expansion of Julfa Armenian merchants' activities in Russia. During these negotiations, Khoja Zakar tried to show his affinity towards the Tsar: the "great Christian ruler." In particular, on every appropriate occasion, he emphasized that since the "tsar is in brotherly friendship with the Shah, they (the khojas) are extremely happy to serve him."<sup>35</sup> However, along with that remark,

<sup>34</sup>*Sobranie aktov, otnosiashikhsia k obozreniiu istorii armianskogo naroda*, [Collection of Documents. Relation to the Overview of the History of Armenian People], part 2, (Erevan, 1938) pp. 286-87.

<sup>35</sup>*Armano-russkie otnosheniia v 17 v.*, vol. I, p. 26.

he also stated that although the representatives of the Armenian company conducted business in Iran with the Shah's decree, exempt of taxes, the religion of His Majesty the king is Islam; and since they were Christians, they would be happy to serve the great king," that is, the tsar.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the Shah had provided Shahrinian with certain degree of authority. In Moscow, he played the role of diplomatic envoy, mandated to normalize Iran's relations with Russia. The Armenian Trade Company and also the Safavid government mandated him to test the government's feeling regarding the signing of a trade agreement. There are documents that serve as evidence for these conclusions.

The Shahrinians were an extremely influential and wealthy family (according to some they were descended from an ancient Armenian noble nakharar dynasty),<sup>37</sup> who conducted large-scale trade with the countries of the East and the West, and thus were vitally interested in the improvement of Russo-Iranian trade relations. In a note presented to the "Posolski Prikaz," the Russian foreign relations institution, Khoja Zakar writes that his father, Sarhad Shahrinian's executives visited many countries on commercial business. A member of the Catholic Carmelite Order writes: "The Shahrinian clan was extremely wealthy. Its trade agents were spread out in every corner of the world."<sup>38</sup> After converting to Catholicism in 1646, the Shahrinian clan became the leader of the Armenian Catholic community of New Julfa, the reason for their close commercial ties with the Catholic states of Europe. There are numerous other facts that show that the Shahrinians enjoyed friendly treatment from the Roman Pope and the Catholic monarchs of Europe.<sup>39</sup>

It is possible that the diplomatic representatives of the Western European states recommended nomination of Zakar Shahrinian as the negotiator and the influential circles of the Western European

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'wn hayots' gaghtakanut'ean* . . . , p. 207.

<sup>38</sup>*A Chronicle of the Carmelites* . . . , vol. I, p. 650.

<sup>39</sup>M. V. Ughurlean, *Patmut'wn hayots' gaght'akanut'ean* . . . , p. 307.



capitals promoted his mission. For, they hoped to establish immediate commercial ties if not with the royal court, then at least with the New Julfa merchants who were involved in the international trade.

The Shahrimanians were also on good terms with the Shah's court. The "Posolski Prikaz" documents mention that Khoja Zakar was considered a "confidant of the Shah" and Ikhtomo Devleti (first minister of the Shah).<sup>40</sup>

All this points to the fact that Zakar Shahrimanian, besides commercial objectives, also pursued certain political goals, in particular on the instructions of the Catholic missionaries working in Iran and of the Iranian government. He was tasked to assess the Russian government's thinking regarding the signing of an Iranian-European military treaty against Turkey.

Ashot Hovhannisian mentions that "thus far, there is no written evidence to show that Khoja Nazar along with the mandates given to him by the government of Iran and the Catholics, had turned his back on the Western European diplomacy and his orientation was tilting towards the government in Moscow, with the expectation of benefit to Armenians in general, and the khoja class in particular."<sup>41</sup> However, it can be assumed that the representatives of the Armenian Catholic community of New Julfa, had begun to look for other avenues for the realization of the political aspirations of the Armenian people, apart from those pursued through the Catholic states of the West. This included orientation towards Russia.

The attempts at establishing trade-economic and political relations between Iran and Russia were unsuccessful, despite the fact that the visits of the Armenian merchants from Iran, India and the East to Russia became more frequent. The records of the Russian customs offices testify to the number of Armenian merchants visiting Russia. The logs for the year 1662-1663 record that important Armenian merchants such as Mikita Petrov, Grigor Savelev, and Stepan

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<sup>40</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia* v 17 v., p. 23-24.

<sup>41</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 481.

Chekhatunov brought numerous items for the Tsar from India, among them a golden mace, and a diamond-encrusted crown, on which the coat of arms of the state of Russia, the double-headed eagle, was fastened.

The Turco-Venetian or Candian war which began in the fourth decade of the seventeenth century gained momentum after 1665, making the export of Iranian raw silk to the Levantine centers extremely difficult. The royal treasury sustained heavy losses. At that time, perhaps the only way out would have been the use of the Russian transit routes. This approach coincided with the interests of the Armenian merchants involved in the international trade. Therefore, a decision was adopted in the royal court in Isfahan to send the representatives of the "Armenian Trade Company" of New Julfa to Moscow.

In February 1666, a delegation of 40 Armenian merchants and artisans headed by Stepan Ramadamski (Stepan Movsisian Ramadov) and Grigor Lusikov (Grigor Matteosian Kusikian or Lusikents) was instructed to conduct negotiations with the Russian government in order to secure the right to import raw silk and other products into Russia. In his letter of appeal addressed to Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich, Grigor Lusikents extensively discussed the motivations which had made the Armenian merchants "solicit the Tsar's goodwill." First, it was mentioned that the "Armenian Trade Company" of New Julfa, to which the Iranian king had granted the monopoly of the export of the Iranian raw silk, had for years exported it through Turkey for which the latter charged heavy taxes. Furthermore, Lusikents emphasized that during this process, the Armenian merchants sustained heavy losses due to attacks and looting by bandits and "individuals who betrayed" the Sultan. And, when they embarked on their journey by ship to Europe from Turkish lands, they were attacked by pirates who likewise looted them. In addition to this, upon receiving permission from the Russian government, their company was ready to shift the export of Iranian raw silk to the Caspian-Volga route towards Russia. Lusikents was convinced this would secure unprecedented revenues for the Russian government. Subsequently, the latter discussed the benefits of signing a trade agreement, which

would create opportunities to organize the regular export of raw silk and other products to Russia, and Novgorod, Arkhangel and Smolensk, and also to the European countries. V. Voskanian rightly states that the New Julfa "Armenian Trade Company" played an important intermediary role in normalizing Iranian-Russian relations in which the Armenian company and the business conducted by it constituted the link between Iran and Russia.<sup>42</sup>

The "Posolski Prikaz" documents reveal that the representatives of the New Julfa trade company had diplomatic mandates as well. As a special envoy of the Safavid government, Grigor Lusikents attempted to create a tripartite military-political treaty among the Russian, Iranian and Polish Kingdoms. In this regard, Grigor Lusikents and his colleagues emerged as the executors of the royal mandates. Apart from trade-economic interests, the representatives of the Armenian capital also pursued political interests, in particular regarding the liberation of Armenia from the Turkish yoke. During this period, a change was taking place in the political sentiments of the Armenian merchants. The opposition of the Armenian merchants to Turkey was growing, and they were tilting towards the European powers, primarily Russia, who were competing with Turkey. There is evidence that indicates that in the seventeenth century, for the Armenians, the realization of an Irano-European treaty, and an Irano-Russian one in particular was viewed as a step, which could contribute to the liberation of the Armenian nation from Turkey.

In its turn, the Russian government welcomed the political aspirations of the Armenian merchants. This in particular applied to Afanasii Ordin-Nashchokin, the head of the "Posolski Prikaz." The latter knew well that unlike the European trade companies which had acquired a monopoly in the trade with the Eastern countries, the Armenian merchants, were politically neutral and could not create

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<sup>42</sup>V. K. Voskanian, *Armiano-russkie ekonomicheskie otnosheniia v 17 v. (Rol armianskogo kupechestva v persidskoi trgovle Rosii)* [Armenian-Russian Economic Relations in the 17th Century (Role of the Armenian Merchants in the Persian Trade of Russia), *Kandidaskaia dissertatsiia* [Ph.D. dissertation], (Erevan, 1948), pp.102-04.

obstacles in the growth of the Russian economy, or use the right to trade with the East through Russia in their political-colonialistic aspirations. On the contrary, as representatives of an oppressed and exploited Christian nation, the Armenians themselves were in need of assistance, and could become a loyal allies of the Russian government."<sup>43</sup>

As a result of the above negotiations, on May 31, 1667, Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich issued a proclamation for the "Armenian Trade Company" of New Julfa, which corresponded to the status of a trade agreement. That proclamation was equal to an agreement between Russia and Iran.<sup>44</sup> The agreement obliged the Armenian merchants to export the entire Iranian raw silk to the Western European countries via Russia. They would receive permission to conduct free trade at the border towns with the neighboring countries of Russia by paying just five per cent taxes. In case their products were not sold in the cities adjacent to the border, the Armenian companies reserved the right to export abroad, also by paying only five per cent taxes. One critically important article of the agreement held that the Armenian merchants were required to return via Russian territory, for which they had to pay seven per cent import tax for the products they acquired abroad, which would generate considerable revenues for the Tsarist treasury.

The Russian government gave guarantees of security to the Armenian merchants, even promising to compensate them for their losses. They also received the right to freedom of movement in Russia and multiple entry to, and exit from, the country.<sup>45</sup>

In return for all this, the Armenian merchants were obligated to stop using the Turkish transit routes, and transfer their entire trade to the Caspian-Volga route. In the agreement was a special provision, which barred the Armenian merchants from selling raw silk to the

<sup>43</sup>Sh. Khachikian, "1667 r. hay-rusakan arewtrakan paymanagire ew Nor Jughayi ink'navar marminnere," [Armenian-Russian Trade Agreement and Autonomous Bodies of New Julfa], Arandznatip *Haykazean hayagitakan handesi*, 8 hatorits, (Beirut, 1980), p.268.

<sup>44</sup>M. Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe opisanie rossiiskoi kommertsii* [Historical Description of the Russian Commerce], (Moscow, 1786) vol. 2, book 2, p. 134.

<sup>45</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v 17 b.*, p. 44-46.

foreign merchants visiting Iran, with the exception of those who had the Shah's special decree.<sup>46</sup>

The 1667 agreement became the foundation of the expansive trade-economic and political relations between the Armenian merchants and the Moscow government. The occasional ties between the Armenian merchants and Russia were replaced by firm, consistent, and expansive trade relations.

The fact that the above-mentioned agreement was signed in accordance with the suggestion of the "Armenian Trade Company" representatives proves that the Russian government too was interested in signing that agreement. It was assumed in Moscow that the Russian merchants could not guarantee the kind of revenues the Armenian merchants were capable of. Thus, disregarding the policy of mercantilism and patronizing its own trade class, the Russian government entrusted a significant portion of the country's Eastern trade to the Armenians.<sup>47</sup> The treasury especially hoped for major financial opportunities from the countries of the West with the help of the Armenians.<sup>48</sup>

Although the 1667 agreement was purely commercial in nature, and did not include any political clauses, its political significance for the Russian government as well as the Armenian merchants was irrefutable. The Russian scholar Y. S. Zevakin likewise believes that the 1667 agreement was not only the result of commercial interests, but also had political motivations. In his opinion, Moscow in its struggle against the Sultan hoped to receive assistance from the Shah, and believed that the granting of the rights to the Armenian merchants could contribute to its plans.<sup>49</sup>

In academician Ashot Hovhannisian's view, the signing of the 1667 agreement not only severed the ties between Iran and Turkey, it

<sup>46</sup>M. Chulkov, *Istoricheskoe opisaniie rossiiskoi kommersii*, p. 38-39.

<sup>47</sup>N. G. Kukanova, *Rol armianskogo kupechestva v razvitii . . .*, p. 56.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>49</sup>E. S. Zevakin, "Persidskii vopros v russko-evropeiskikh otnosheniakh v 17 v.," [Persian Question in Russian-European Relations in the 17th Century], *Istoricheskie Zapiski*, T. 8, 1940, p. 158.



also drove a wedge between the Armenian merchants of Iran and the Western European powers.<sup>50</sup>

The above-mentioned realities were no secret even to the foreign observers. Thus, the Austrian ambassador, Rienguber, states that the "Moscowites have great friendship with the Persians, partly for their marvelous products, and partly in spite of Turkey, which the Persians consider their major enemy."

It is critical to note that in the international situation in the sixth decade of the seventeenth century, Iran could not remain solely an attractive economic subject for Russia. On January 30, 1667, in the village of Andrusovo, Russia signed a peace treaty with Poland according to which Russia was obliged to become its loyal ally. That treaty significantly strengthened Russia's hands in its struggle against the khanates of Turkey and the Crimea. Undoubtedly, that struggle would become even more productive if Iran also joined it.

The fact that the 1667 treaty was viewed by Russia as being of political significance is affirmed by the following documents. First, Moscow considered it indispensable to keep Poland informed of the signing of the agreement with which it conducted negotiations for the signing of a cooperation treaty. On December 14, 1667, in Moscow the parties signed a treaty which required them to take a united position against the aggressive operations of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the agreement signed in Moscow with the Armenian Trade Company was viewed as an important step in the normalization of Russo-Iranian relations. In the name of that major objective, the Russian government even made serious concessions. Russo-Iranian relations had been extremely strained, especially due to the Georgian affairs. During the fourth decade of the seventeenth century, the Moscow government had taken Kakhet under its auspices. Shortly after, the Imeretian Kingdom was also added. The pro-Russian Georgian nobility spared no efforts to strengthen the ties of various Georgian regions with Russia. In this regard, the Moscow government made it clear to the Safavid court that the influence of Russia in Georgia was a reality

<sup>50</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 453.



that could not be overlooked. However, Moscow was ready to conduct negotiations with Isfahan regarding the Georgian matters.

Finally, the 1667 agreement provided for Russia an opportunity to study the military-political developments in the Transcaucasus, Iran, and Western Europe. It is not accidental that in his letter addressed to the Armenian merchants of Istanbul, on behalf of the Armenian Trade Company, Grigor Lusikents asked them to gather information regarding the international developments for the Russian Tsar.

Besides the opportunities furnished by the 1667 agreement, the Moscow government made efforts to normalize Russo-Iranian commercial-political relations, particularly through the establishment of direct diplomatic ties. Thus, in 1667, Moscow dispatched a diplomatic envoy, Kliment Iyevlev, to Iran, whose mission was to submit the agreement signed between the Armenian Trade Company and Russia to the Shah. However, the peasant war, which began under Stepan Razin, prevented Iyevlev's mission from reaching Iran. He returned to Moscow in the same year. Thereafter, in 1668, the Moscow representative of the Armenian Trade Company, the Englishman, Thomas Brian, was sent to Shah Suleyman (1666-1694). He carried a letter from the New Julfa Trade Company seeking the continuance of trade with Russia. He was also commissioned to present to the Shah a copy of the 1667 agreement. In addition, the Tsar informed the Shah about the treaty signed with Poland, and called on him to join this anti-Turkish alliance. However, Thomas Brian and the Englishmen accompanying him fell sick and died on their way to Isfahan. Only one member of the delegation, Naum Kolesnikov, survived to submit the Tsar's letters to the Shah. Without delay, the royal court dispatched Kolesnikov back to Moscow with letters from Shah Suleyman to the Tsar. This haste testifies to the fact that the Safavid government was extremely keen to have commercial-economic relations with Russia. In the meantime, the Shah's government attentively followed the course of the Russian foreign policy with the aim of entering political negotiations with it when appropriate conditions arose.

In this regard, Grigor Lusikents is an important source. The Shah, even before Lusikents' trip to Moscow, inquired whether the Tsar was at peace with the German, i.e., Western European rulers, and the Polish king.<sup>51</sup> Ikhtomo-Devlet presented Grigor Lusikents to the Shah, who ordered him to inform the Tsar that his predecessors had laid the foundations for lasting friendship with the Russian Tsars, and that he, Shah Suleyman, wished to strengthen his relations with his Highness the Tsar.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, emerging from Iran's dire domestic and foreign political and economic conditions, the Shah's government decided to welcome the suggestions of the Russian government for beginning a new round of negotiations. However, at this stage, as in the past, the Shah's government had no intention of signing a Russo-Iranian anti-Ottoman treaty, and tried to restrict the negotiations to commercial issues.

In 1668, Bogdan Gurdi (of Armenian descent), the ambassador of King Jan Kazimir of Poland arrived in Iran.

Biographical information about Gurdi is scarce. It is only known that in the fifth decade of the seventeenth century, he emerged in Poland, where he had enlisted in the Polish army. In 1662, he received the title of *rodmeister*. Apparently, he caught the attention of the authorities in the military services for which, in 1662, the army's delegates in the *seym* (parliament) demanded that he be given the title of *shliakhtich* (nobility). However, this did not materialize. Between 1668-1675, Bogdan Gurdi, as the ambassador to King Jan Kazimir was at the court of Shah Suleyman. Returning to Poland, he received a warm reception from King Jan III Sobieski. In 1676, for his services to the *Rech Pospolita*, the *seym* bestowed upon him the title of *shliakhtich*. In 1676, King Jan III Sobieski dispatched Bogdan Gurdi to Iran as the liaison and resident representative in the Shah's court. Holding his position, he lived in Iran for 23 years, and only in 1699, with the special commissioning of Shah Houssein, did he leave for

<sup>51</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v 17 v.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

Poland. During that excursion he became sick in Moscow, and died there on January 12, 1700.

It should be noted that Poland's common borders with the Tatar dominions, Turkey, as well as the need to cultivate an alliance with Iran against Turkey had raised a serious need for acquiring experts with corresponding linguistic skills and familiarity with the politics of the East. The best qualified were the Armenians belonging to the Polish-Armenian nobility and the merchant representatives, who became the "pioneers of the Polish diplomacy in the East."

The Polish-Armenians voluntarily accepted diplomatic missions in the East, especially when in their native country, Armenia, from the second half of the sixteenth century. Around this time the political consciousness saw a significant revival.

On the other hand, the favorable policy of the Polish kings towards the Armenian national question encouraged the Polish-Armenian politicians. It is known, for example, that Prime Minister Zamoiski in 1590 made a special appearance at the seym and gave a speech on the Armenian Question. The idea of the "reawakening of Armenia" has been attributed to King Jan Sobieski."

The official responsibility of the Gurdi ambassadorship was to convey to the royal court information about the "alliance" treaty signed between Poland and Russia. However, it was also given a secret mission, first, to persuade Iran to accept the anti-Ottoman military treaty, and then have the royal court contribute to a treaty signed with Russia by the Armenian Trade Company on the condition that a portion of the exports would be imported to Poland.<sup>53</sup>

Grigor Lusikents and Bogdan Gurdi worked together with one main objective. Thus, in the royal court, Bogdan Gurdi enthusiastically defended the interests of the Armenian Trade Company, demanding that the Iranian goods be exported to Poland, not by the Persian merchants, but exclusively by the Armenian merchants.<sup>54</sup> They also

<sup>53</sup>G. A. Zedginidze, *Iz istorii polsko-russkikh diplomaticheskikh otnoshenii s Iranom*. (Deyatelnost Bogdana Gurdzhitskogo) [From the History of Polish-Russian Diplomatic Relations with Iran. (The Activity of Bogdan Gurdzhitski), *Avtoreferat kandidatskoi dissertatsii*, [Synopsis of Ph.D. Dissertation], (Tbilisi, 1971,) p. 13.

<sup>54</sup>Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov (TsGADA) f. 79, (S. Petersburg, 1669) no.23, p. 321.

jointly made efforts towards the realization of a military treaty among Russia, Iran and Poland against Turkey. In order to achieve their objective, the Polish ambassador in Isfahan intimated to the Shah that according to the information available to him, the Turks were about to launch a military operation against Iran. The terrorized Shah immediately summoned Grigor Lusikents to the court and asked him whether it was true that the Tsar had signed a peace treaty with Poles and whether he was in a condition to defend Iran against the Turks.<sup>55</sup> In answer to this question, Lusikents unhesitatingly responded that if Russia, in alliance with Poland, faced Turkey, the latter would be devastated.<sup>56</sup>

Apparently, the arrival of Bogdan Gurdi in Iran and the pivotal developments in the international arena led the Shah to send a new ambassador to Moscow. This time, to ensure the success of the mission, Grigor Lusikents was included in it. The latter was dispatched to Moscow for the second time in 1671, accompanied by twenty-two men.<sup>57</sup> He was to conduct negotiations in the name of the Shah regarding a number of issues: to demand compensation for the losses incurred by the Iranian merchants as a result of the Stepan Razin revolts, negotiate regarding the issues related to the Georgian affairs, and come to a lasting understanding with the Russian government regarding the signing of a new trade agreement. Shah Suleyman gave to his envoy, Grigor Lusikents, a letter addressed to Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich, in which he gave his consent to the provisions of the agreement with the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company.<sup>58</sup> That letter shows clearly that the Shah considered the trade conducted by the Iranian-Armenians with Russia to be of political significance for Iran and Russia.

Grigor Lusikents also took with him a letter from Catholicos Petros of Gandzasar addressed to Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich. In that letter,

<sup>55</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia* v 17 b., p. 77.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>57</sup>TsGADA, F.100/1, kh, no.2, 1666-1667, p. 87.

<sup>58</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia* v 17 b., p. 77. 229, pp. 89-90.

the Catholicos requested the Tsar's support for the Armenian merchants and the entire Armenian nation.<sup>59</sup>

Already, in July 1671, Lusikents had informed the Moscow government from Derbend, that regarding the question of Georgia's heir-to-the-throne, he had done everything requested by the Russian court, and asked for the assistance of Khasbulat Cherkaski to convince Ordin-Nashchokin not to do anything regarding this question until his arrival in Moscow.

During his negotiations in Moscow, Grigor Lusikents emerged as the Shah's ambassador as well as the representative of the Iranian-Armenian merchants, the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company in particular. At the outset of the negotiations, he encountered a number of difficulties. First, before his arrival in Moscow, there had occurred an incident which had hurt Russo-Iranian relations. On his way to Moscow, Stepan Razin's men had confiscated the personal belongings of Yusuf Zuhan Beg, Iran's ambassador, as well as the Shah's letters.<sup>60</sup> During the negotiations in Moscow, the Shah's ambassador adopted a hard position, and put forward certain conditions to the Russian government which were not acceptable to the latter.

It took a major effort by Grigor Lusikents to ease tensions in the Russo-Iranian relations. He succeeded in convincing the Tsar not to sever the relations with the Iranian ambassador. Thereafter, Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich refused to accede to the Iranian ambassador's demand of forty-thousand tuman compensation for the losses that the Iranian merchants had suffered because of the revolting Cosacks.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Moscow expressed its dissatisfaction that the Shah had not arrested Stepan Razin's representatives during the latter's visit and nor sent them to Moscow in chains.

Finally, in the "Posolski Prikaz", it was declared to Yusuf Zuhan Beg that until the arrival of Shah Suleyman's next ambassador to Moscow, Russia would refrain from sending an ambassador to Iran.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>60</sup>E. S. Zevakin, *Persidskii vopros...*, pp. 158-59.

<sup>61</sup>TsGADA, F.77/1. kh. 15, t. 153.

<sup>62</sup>TsGADA, F.77/1, kh.1, t. 22-29.



The Shah's angry ambassador refused to accept the Tsar's gifts, and asked for permission to return to his homeland.<sup>63</sup>

This international scene – the deterioration of the Polish-Turkish relations in particular – forced the Moscow government to make concessions. It was absolutely not the time to confront the Shah. Unhappy with the Andrusov peace treaty, the Sultan had attracted Pyotr Doroshenko, the "hetman" (Cosacks' leader) of the Right-Bank Ukraine, and had begun intense war preparations. In 1668, Doroshenko was able to remove E. Briukhovitski and declare himself the ruler (hetman) of all Ukraine. The Moscow government had to undertake a series of retaliatory measures. In 1672, the Sultan was cautioned that in case of the latter's renewed attacks on Poland, Alexei Mikhaylovich would order Don Cosacks to attack Turkey's Black Sea coasts.<sup>64</sup> Besides that, an attempt was again made to revive the anti-Turkish treaty. With that intention in mind, an officer of Novgorod Prikaz, Fyodor Voznitsin along with a translator, Ivan Kurdov, was sent to Iran. However, Shah Suleyman was not ready to damage his relationship with the Sultan, which he had developed with extreme difficulty. Hence, Voznitsin received a cold reception in Isfahan. Furthermore, the Cosacks treated him with disdain by forcing him to kneel before the Shah, and did not even inquire about the well being of the Tsar. The Shah categorically refused to wage war against Turkey.<sup>65</sup>

International relations deteriorated further. On October 23, 1672, Turkey won a major victory against Russia's ally, Poland, forcing the latter to begin peace negotiations. The Sultan demanded the entire Right Bank of Ukraine and Podolye. The Russians realized increasingly that the participation of Iran in the anti-Turkey treaty could change the course of events. Therefore, they commissioned two representatives, Andrei Priklonski and Alexei Bogdanov, to attend to the above-mentioned matter. However, their efforts failed, since once

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 22-29.

<sup>64</sup>*Istoriya diplomatii*, vol. 1, p. 179.

<sup>65</sup>*TsGADA*, F.77/1, 1697, l.6; F 77/2,1673, gramota No.54; F. 77/1, kh. 16, ll., 92-93.



again the Shah categorically refused to commence a war against Turkey.

In Isfahan, Andrei Bogdanov realized that Iran was extremely unhappy with Moscow. To improve the situation, in August 1673, the Russian court sent Constantine Khristoforov to Iran who, in Isfahan, was caught in an extremely difficult situation. At that time, anti-Russian sentiments were being instigated in the Persian court by a faction headed by Shkhali Khan. Grigor Lusikents informed Constantine Khristoforov that the merchants robbed by Stepan Razin had instigated the Shah against Russia saying that all the goods looted by Razin had emerged in the Tsarist treasury. Grigor Lusikents further stated that in the Shah's court a pro-Russian faction was functioning under Aghasi Bashi Zeynal Khan, Mirza Muman Mamalik and others, who did not consider worthwhile to engage in a confrontation for 500 rubles with the Tsar.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these facts, which made K. Khristoforov's mission fruitless, the Russian government did not give up, and hoped that eventually it would succeed in convincing the Shah to join the anti-Turkish military treaty.

Undoubtedly, the tense situation created in the Russo-Iranian political relations was to damage trade-economic relations between the two. However, the 1672 treaty was not destined to provide broad opportunities for the expansion of Armeno-Russian trade relations. First, the Russian market for the raw Iranian silk was extremely limited. "The unprocessed Iranian silk," rightly asserted academician Ashot Hovhannisian, was not in sufficient demand in old Moscow. The only purchasers of the silk products were the representatives of the upper class. There were no state-owned or private manufacturers who needed that raw silk. Silk production in Russia had begun during the reign of Tsar Alexei. However, Iranian raw silk was used for making belts and ribbons, and for the weaving of minor products of similar nature.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup>*TsGADA*, F.77/1, kh. no.2, 1675, l. 283.

<sup>67</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 446.

Furthermore, the Volga-Caspian road in the seventeenth century was neither suited nor safe for trade. Hence the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company did not fulfill the provisions of 1667 agreement by ceasing to use the Turkish routes and exporting their products via the Volga-Caspian route. Grigor Lusikents in his 1671 explanatory note says that when the news was received that Stepan Razin had looted the merchants, the Armenians of Julfa moved to the country of Rums (Turkey), saying that when the Russian land was cleansed, they would again adopt the Russian routes.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, only a small portion of the Armenian merchants, that is, the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company was incorporated in the 1667 agreement. The rest of the merchants, among them those of New Julfa, relied on the Turkish transit route, and had no obligation to conduct trade with Russia.

The New Julfa Armenian Trade Company played an important intermediary role in normalizing relations between Iran and Russia. The first steps in that direction were taken by the very same company. In 1668, Thomas Brien, the representative of the company in Moscow, arrived in Iran, carrying a letter addressed to the Shah, requesting that he contribute to the Armenians' trade with Russia.

Almost simultaneously, Grigor Lusikents departed from Isfahan for Moscow as the ambassador of Shah Suleyman. He carried a letter from the Shah addressed to Alexei Mikhaylovich. The letter expressed his agreement with the terms of the agreement signed with the Armenian Trade Company.<sup>69</sup> Grigor Lusikents also gained Shah Sulyeman's declaration regarding permission for the Armenian merchants to conduct free trade with Russia.

In July 1672, in the "Posolski Prikaz," a meeting was held regarding trade relations between Russia and New Julfa Armenian Trade Company. During the consultations, the Moscow merchants declared that the permits granted to the Armenian Trade Company were damaging to their trade and the Russian treasury. They argued that in

<sup>68</sup>*Armano-russkie otnosheniia* v 17 v., p. 72.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 84-90.

the past when they purchased products from the Armenians, they handed them over to the treasury or resold them to the foreigners. The revenue generated, silver or gold, was handed over to the treasury, which was beneficial for them as well as for the Russian government. And now, the Armenian Trade Company entered into direct contacts with the foreigners, and without the mediation of the Russian merchants, sold their products to them. In addition, the gold and silver received from the transactions did not remain in Russia, but were taken out of the country to Iran by the Armenian merchants. Furthermore, the Russian merchants protested that the Armenians, by-passing the Moscow merchants, also exported European goods to the countries in the East through Russian territory. Therefore, the Russian government was asked to restrict the permits granted to the Armenian merchants, and allow the Armenian Trade Company to conduct business only in Astrakhan and Moscow with the government treasury and the Russian merchants, and not with foreigners.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the protests of the Moscow merchants, the Tsar commissioned the new leader of Posolski Prikaz, A. S. Matveyev, to enter negotiations with Grigor Lusikents for the signing of a new agreement. These negotiations were concluded successfully with the signing of a new trade agreement on February 7, 1673.<sup>71</sup> In comparison with the 1667 agreement, it was more restrictive, because, first, it allowed the Armenian merchants to export goods only to those European countries, which were not in "conflict" with Russia. In other words, those that were on friendly terms with the Russian state. Undoubtedly, this reservation made the trade of the Armenian merchants dependent on Russia's foreign policy. Also the agreement emphasized that the goods could be exported abroad only when they could not be sold in the Russian markets.

Finally, unlimited open-dated permits for the export and import of goods from Russia were removed, and the permits were to be issued for each trip.

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<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.74-76.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.110-113, 248.

With this agreement, the Russian government demanded that the Armenian Trade Company give its solemn word that it would export the Iranian raw silk to only Russia and would not sell to foreigners in Iran or in Turkey. In that regard, on February 7, the day of the signing of the agreement, Grigor Lusikents swore on the Armenian Bible, in the name of the Armenian Trade Company, that the Armenian merchants would henceforth cease conducting trade with the European countries via Turkey, and would import the entire Iranian raw silk to Russia and export only through the latter to the European countries.

One restricting provision of the agreement was that the Russian government stopped providing compensation for the losses sustained by the Armenian merchants on the routes, a provision which was included in the 1667 agreement.

Thus, the Armenian merchants were deprived of the right to conduct business with the West via Russia, that was more important for them than conducting trade with the relatively limited Russian markets. It is not accidental that the Russian merchants complained to the "Posolski Prikaz" that the Armenian merchants, in violation of the agreement, were not importing the Iranian raw silk to Russia, and instead continued to export the high quality Iranian silk in large quantities through the previous routes. They even presented figures to prove that the import of the raw silk by the Armenian merchants into Russia in 1674 was of a negligible quantity.

Later, on July 17, 1676, the Russian government permitted the Armenian merchants to freely export their goods to the Western countries through Arkhangelsk.<sup>72</sup> The reduction in the import of raw silk and various other Eastern goods to Russia, due to the restrictions imposed by the 1673 agreement, and the subsequent loss to the Tsarist treasury, were the major reasons for this decision. Moreover, Moscow feared that the Armenian merchants would completely halt the export of raw silk to Russia, as a result of which the Turkish towns would

<sup>72</sup>Posolstvo Kunraada Fan-Klenka k tsarium Alekseyu Mikhailovichu i Feodoru Alekseyevichu [The Diplomatic Mission of Kunraad Fon-Klenk to the Tsars Aleksei Mikhailovich and Fyodor Alekseyevich], (S. Petersburg, 1900), p. 463.

benefit by becoming the intermediaries of the Iranian trade with the West. The Russian authorities also feared that the restriction of the Iranian-Armenian merchants' rights could hurt the relations between the Russian and Iranian cities. And furthermore, with the cessation of the import of raw silk to the Russian market by the Armenian merchants, Russia's rival, Turkey, would become the main intermediary between the Iranian trade with the West. Finally, the Russian government did not wish to worsen its relationship with the Armenian merchants, who played a major role in the political relations between Iran and Russia, for Moscow had reasons to believe that in the present, and in the future, the Armenians could constitute loyal support for Russia's Eastern policy. Perhaps that was the reason why the 1673 agreement permitted only the Armenian Trade Company merchants to conduct tax free business, whereas the Russian government adopted a different position regarding the Iranian and other merchants, who were prohibited to trade with any city except Astrakhan.<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, this was a unique privilege granted to the Armenian merchants—they could now conduct trade with the Western countries via Russia free of competition.

The Tsarist government attempted to portray Grigor Lusikents as the drafter of the trade agreement so that it could avoid severing its relations with the Shah. Thus, on February 21, 1673, Grigor Lusikents asked the leader of the Posloski Prikaz, A. S. Matveyev, to conceal the fact that the trade agreement had been signed until his departure for Iran, so that he himself could report personally to the Shah in that regard and thereby prevent undesirable complications.<sup>74</sup> In the meantime, he asked Moscow to delay the return of the Iranian ambassador and the Iranian merchants to Iran for a month, so that he could precede them and be the first to have an audience with the Shah. On the request of Grigor Lusikents, the Russian government decreed that for political reasons the Iranian merchants and diplomats would receive different treatment. The former would remain under

<sup>73</sup>TsGADA, F. 100/1, kh, No.2, l.l. 418-19.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 246-47.



the supervision of the customs officials, and the diplomats under the Voyeroda's office.<sup>75</sup>

During the 1672 Moscow negotiations, Grigor Lusikents informed the Posolski Prikaz that he had a confidential request, which he refused to present in writing. He feared it might reach the Shah and result in his punishment. Very often the Armenian functionaries attempted to further the cause of the signing of a treaty against Turkey between Iran and the European powers, even without the corresponding authority being granted to them by the Shah. Their sole consideration was the interest of the Armenian merchants. The fact that the Armenian khojas did not spare their financial support for the realization of these efforts explained Grigor Lusikents' efforts.

Undoubtedly, by adopting the role of intermediaries and diplomatic emissaries in furthering the cause of the signing of an anti-Turkish treaty between Iran and the European countries, the representatives of the Armenian merchant capital pursued political as well as trade interests, in particular, the liberation of Armenia from the Ottoman yoke. Beginning with the sixth decade of the seventeenth century, the Armenian merchant class commenced not only to shape, but also directly to take part in, talks aimed at the liberation of Armenia.

The July 17, 1676, agreement greatly boosted the Armenian merchants' trade in Russia. While they had occasionally visited Astrakhan and Moscow between 1673-1674, in 1676, the visits became more regular. They came in groups of ten or more, carrying large quantities of merchandise. Here, it is interesting to note that between 1676 and 1686, more than half of the Armenian merchants' visits took place in the Western regions of Russia.<sup>76</sup> Thereby confirming that the main objective of the Armenian merchants in signing the agreement with the Russian government was to conduct business with Holland, Sweden, England, and other Western European countries and secure an extremely high volume of exchange of goods. Thus, according to the 1676 records of the Posolski Prikaz, only one group of Armenian

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, t. 435.

<sup>76</sup>N. G. Kukanova, *Rol armianskogo kupechestva . . .*, p. 28.



merchants that requested permission to travel to Holland, which included Yegup Boghosov and his ten colleagues, exported from Arkhangelsk to Holland 1170 poods (Russian measure of weight equivalent to 16 kilograms) raw silk.<sup>77</sup> In 1679, Kharapet Matveyev (Hayrapet Matevosian) with his colleagues had imported to Arkhangelsk 215 poods and 20 pounds raw silk for the purpose of export to Holland.<sup>78</sup> In 1681, only one merchant, named, E. Grigorev, brought 157 poods of silk to Arkhangelsk. In particular, large groups of merchants visited the 1683 trade fair in Arkhangelsk.

As in the past, the Armenian merchants' trade in Arkhangelsk and their export of goods abroad led to protests by the Russian merchants, who tried to prove to the authorities that the Armenian merchants were keeping them out of the raw silk trade. However, since that trade continued to secure large sums for the treasury, the protests of the Russian merchants had no effect on the government.

Every Western power attempted to acquire the monopoly in the eastern trade with the Armenian merchants. Thus, in 1676, the Dutchman, van Klenk, tried to secure the Armenian merchants' commitment that the latter would import all the silk via Arkhangelsk to Holland and not to England, Hamburg, or elsewhere.<sup>79</sup> Until 1686, the Dutch partially succeeded in realizing that policy. However, competitors soon emerged, among them Sweden, the most dangerous. Sweden turned the Baltic Sea into a domestic "lake" and by acquiring control of the Pomerani, Oder and Vezer tributaries by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, attempted to transfer the trade from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. Thus, Sweden first intended to strike a blow at Moscow's Anglo-Dutch trade, and then, at the Eastern trade with Iran and India, which was conducted over Arkhangelsk, attempting to tie it to Western Europe via the Finnish Gulf in general, and the Swedish trade system in particular.<sup>80</sup> To realize this farsighted, long-term policy on February

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GADA, F.100, delo za 1676g.

*id.*

*soolstvo Kunraada Fan-Klenka k tsariam . . .*, p. 458.

*I. Arkhangelskii, Anglo-gollandskaia . . .*, p. 20.

4, 1673, the Swedish Ambassador Adolf Eberschild, told to Posolski Prikaz that if Russia were to sign a treaty with Sweden, Russia would free itself from domestic and foreign complexities. And, by transferring the trade over Arkhangelsk to the Baltic Sea, Russia would gain great benefits in the West. In this regard, instead of one route to Arkhangelsk, the foreigners could conduct three excursions a year towards the Baltic Sea ports.<sup>81</sup> This was important because Arkhangelsk had its liabilities: its port was open for only six months in a year—for the remaining period, it was frozen.

However, despite this grim outlook, Russian government refused to give its consent. It had its reasons, among which perhaps the most important was that, with all its shortcomings, Arkhangelsk had the important advantage that at any given time, irrespective of Russia's relations with its neighbors, Moscow could maintain trade relations via Arkhangelsk with various European countries, among them Sweden and Poland. Therefore, Sweden was viewed by Moscow as no less dangerous a competitor and enemy of Russia than Holland. Sweden's diplomatic proposition regarding the transfer of the trade center from Arkhangelsk to Novgorod or any other city was interpreted in the Posolski Prikaz, as being inconsistent with the economic and political interests of Russia.

Despite this rejection, the Swedish government continued to raise the issue. Eventually, its persistence bore fruit. In 1686, the Swedish ambassador, Fabritsius, received the Russian government's permission to allow the Armenian merchants to depart for the Western European countries from either Novgorod or Narva. The reason for Russia's concession was that it still nurtured the hope that Iran, whose commerce would benefit as a result of that move, would emerge against Turkey. In any event, in Moscow, it was assumed that in extreme conditions, the Russians could count on the Shah's neutrality.<sup>82</sup> But there were other serious reasons for the concession. On May 6 1686, the Russian government signed an "Eternal Peace" treaty with Poland and joined the Holy League of the European

<sup>81</sup>V. G. Kurts, *Sochinenie Kilburgera* . . . , p. 1.

<sup>82</sup>E. S. Zevakin, *Persidskii vopros v russko-evropeiskikh* . . . , p. 153.

countries, the purpose of which was to conduct a struggle against the Ottoman Empire. Under these circumstances, the trade relations of the Armenians with Sweden were viewed as an important step towards strengthening the political ties. It is certain that the granting of the right to the Armenians to conduct business over Novgorod with Sweden preceded Russia's joining the Holy League.

On September 1, 1686, the Julfa merchants, Safar Vasilev and Anush Vardanov, were the first to receive permission to transport merchandise via Novgorod to Sweden.<sup>83</sup> Thereafter, the commercial activities of the Armenian merchants took place mainly through Novgorod. From 1692 until 1697, all records in the Posolski Prizka testify that journeys abroad took place through this city.

Thus, on January 21, 1696, one Stepan Topchiant, along with thirty of his colleagues, moved to Sweden from Russia. "On May sixth of the same year, Nikoghayos Tomayants, Simoniants, Simon Boghdaniant, and Grigor Astvatsatrian, and on November twenty-second, Hagop Sergiyov, and on December twenty-fourth, Safar Barseghian went to that country for trade purposes."<sup>84</sup>

With the opening of the Novgorod route, the exported merchandise of the Armenian merchants not only grew in volume, it also became diverse in terms of commodities.

According to the records of the Narva customs house, the Armenian merchants travelled from Novgorod not only to Sweden, but also to Lubeck, and from there they went to Holland, France, England, Denmark, Germany, Italy, as well as the Baltic countries. It is known that an executive of the Julfa Armenian merchant capital, Philip de Zagly, had extensive operations in the Baltics. In September 1696, he signed an agreement with Duke Frederick Kazimir of Livonia, Kurlandia and Sekalen.<sup>85</sup> One can assume that there were many Armenian merchants operating in the Baltic countries.

<sup>83</sup>TsGADA, F. 100, 1686, delo No.5.

<sup>84</sup>H. Ter-Hovhancants', *Patmut'wn Nor Jughayu*, pp. 176-77.

<sup>85</sup>R. Gulbenkian, *Philippe de Zagly, Marchand Arménien de Julfa, et l'établissement du commerce Persan en Courlande en 1696*, Extrait de la "Revue des Etudes Arméniennes", Nouvelle série, t. VII, (Paris, 1970), pp. 361-426.

Beginning with the seventh decade of the seventeenth century, the Armenian merchants established regular trade relations with Brandenburg. Since the fifteenth century, a series of routes had been developed from Brandenburg and Saxony via Poland and Lithuania to Western and Northwestern Russia. This network of trade routes originated in Leipzig, crossed through Poznan and Warsaw, Vilnius, Polotsk, Smolensk and reached Moscow.

In 1670, the Armenian merchant Hakob Samokutli, arrived in Moscow from Brandenburg, bringing with him a letter from Brandenburg's Kiufuhrst stating that he had been accepted as an employee of the Brandenburg ruler to import raw silk and other Iranian goods to Prussia via Russia. The letter asked for assistance for the Armenian merchants.<sup>86</sup>

The Russian government welcomed this request because from a commercial and economic standpoint, a weak Brandenburg could not threaten the interests of Russia. In addition, trade with Brandenburg hurt the Hanseatic League, which had emerged as one of the serious competitors of the Russian merchants.

The Armenian merchants conducted business with Brandenburg as well as Poland via Smolensk, which at that time constituted one of the major commercial centers, with the neighboring countries of Russia's western borders.

It is worth noting that although the Persians, Azeris, and others also participated in the Russo-Iranian trade, the Armenian merchants were the only ones who exclusively conducted transit trade with Western Europe via Russia.

After the opening of the Novgorod route, the volume of the goods exported by the Armenian merchants not only grew, but also got diversified. Besides raw silk and various traditional Iranian goods, the merchants exported to Western Europe goods from India and other Eastern countries: pearls, precious stones, dyes, camel wool, spices, expensive silk, wool textiles, etc. And from the Western countries via Russia they imported into Iran mainly English, Dutch

<sup>86</sup>E. S. Zevakin, *Persidskii vopros v russko-evropeiskikh . . .*, p. 153.

and Hamburgian cloth, various textiles, porcelain ware, mirrors, knives, forks, scissors, candlesticks, eyeglasses, amber, paints, sugar, honey, copper, locks, books, jewelry, false pearls, decks of cards, needles, beads, sword blades, binoculars, German pitchers, and other products.<sup>87</sup> Constantin of Julfa in his *Ashkharhazhoghov* also lists the goods which were exported from Russia to Iran. They were: sable, black fox, coypu, squirrel, calf leather, beaver, fish bones (teeth), honey wax, and so forth.<sup>88</sup>

The Russian government expressed great interest in promoting the Armenian merchants' trade with Russia and through it with the Western European countries. In a 1690 decree sent to the rulers (*voyevodas*) of several cities lying between the Astrakhan and Caspian-Volga route, the Tsar ordered them not to create obstacles for the Armenian merchants' trade and not to violate the provisions of the agreements signed with them.<sup>89</sup> Peter I, during the course of the preparations of his Azov Sea campaign, in 1692, informed the Shah through the Iranian ambassador Mohammed Hosein Khan, that it was the Tsar's wish that the trade conducted by Armenians be supported and encouraged. In 1697, Peter I issued a special decree regarding other kinds of assistance to be rendered to the Armenian merchants who arrived in Russia.<sup>90</sup>

It is interesting to note that when in 1689 the Russian government prohibited the use of Russia for trade with the Western European countries to all the Eastern merchants, it made an exception for the members of the Armenian Trade Company.

Thus, despite the fact that in the last two decades of the seventeenth century the Armenian merchants' trade via the Caspian-Volga routes expanded significantly, it would be wrong to overestimate the value of that trade route for the Armenian *khojas*. The fact is that this trade route never gained special significance for the Armenian merchants.

<sup>87</sup>TsGADA, F.1684, d.3, l.5; d.5, ll. 1,6.

<sup>88</sup>*M. Mashlots'i anvan matenadaran*, dzer. No.8443, p.157a.

<sup>89</sup>*Armiansko-russkie otnosheniia v 17 v.*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 244-45.



As in the past, the main trade between Iran and Europe was conducted through the Ottoman Empire. "In the seventeenth century," wrote E. S. Zevakin, "Russo-Persian trade was less significant than Persia's trade with Turkey, India and Europe. That is confirmed by the existence of several trade routes between Iran and Turkey, India and other countries, which many European travellers have paid specific attention to in their descriptions of trade with Europe, Turkey, and India. The Moscovian guests, (i.e., merchants) and people engaged in trade, in their stories (travelogues) likewise confirm that the main portion of the Persian silk was exported via the sea and through the Turkish territory."<sup>91</sup>

In this regard, Ashot Hovhannisian makes an important observation. The Armenian khojas "were not in search of markets in the territory of the Moscovite Kingdom, but of suitable transit routes."<sup>92</sup> In actual fact, as has been mentioned, the Russian market was very small for Eastern goods, including the Iranian raw silk which it did not have the capacity to absorb. Russia lacked silk manufacturing plants. Therefore, the demand for the primary materials was limited. The underdeveloped status of manufacturing in Russia also significantly reduced the volume of trade with its neighboring countries. The extremely limited variety of goods exported to Russia by the Armenian merchants testifies to those facts.

Therefore, in comparison with the Turkish route, the Caspian-Volga one was less utilized and less secure.

Due to the above mentioned reasons, although the Armenian Trade Company of New Julfa had promised Moscow during the signing of the agreement, that it would stop the trade of raw silk and other goods through the Turkish route, it did not honor its promise, thus, causing great disappointment to the Russian merchants and authorities. Indeed, Moscow began using official-governmental means to put pressure on the Armenian merchants. Thus, on April 2, 1692, the Posolski Prikaz, through the Iranian ambassador, demanded that the

<sup>91</sup>E. S. Zevakin, *Persidskii vopros v russko-evropeiskikh . . .*, p. 157.

<sup>92</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner . . .*, p. 448.



Armenian merchants implement the provisions of signed agreement and cease using the Turkish transit routes and export the Iranian raw silk to Russia.<sup>93</sup>

In any event, with the efforts and initiatives of the Armenian merchants, the Caspian-Volga route gained the significance of an international route, and it provided Russia with the opportunity to enter into immediate commercial relations with Iran and Transcaucasus, and through them, with the countries of the East.

The Armenian merchants' trade via the Caspian-Volga route in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries showed an expanding trend. The flow of the Armenian population of Eastern Armenian and Iranian communities to Russia, in the light of the growing favorable economic and political conditions, became massive. "Armenians from the land of Ararat, also country of Alans, Shosha means the capital Isfahan, cities of Mazandaran, Hamadan, Qazvin, Tabriz, and other areas, moved to the north and the seaport of Astrakhan, and Ghzlar, . . . some were merchants, some craftsmen, others farmers and peasants."<sup>94</sup>

One of the most important elements in the Eastern policy of Peter I was the development of trade by the Armenians with the Eastern countries, especially Iran and India. He specifically nurtured the idea of connecting the Baltic Sea with the Caspian Sea, as well as the waterways leading to India.

It was Peter I's desire to open the trade route via Russia to connect India to the European trade routes. Thus, after the establishment of Petersburg, the emperor tried to shift the trade routes for silk and other Eastern goods to his newly established capital.<sup>95</sup> For the realization of his grand plans, it was indispensable for him to attract the Armenian merchants. Peter I tried in every possible way to attract the Armenian merchants and provided many privileges and rights for

<sup>93</sup>TsGADA, F.100, delo za 1676g.

<sup>94</sup>M. Mashitots'i anwan matenadaran, dzer. No.7383, t 4b.

<sup>95</sup>L. A. Nikiforov, *Russko-angliiskie otnosheniia pri Petre I*, [Russian-English Relations at the Reign of Peter I], (Moscow, 1950).

them. Thus, in 1711, he issued strict orders to the authorities of Astrakhan to refrain from creating any obstacles for the Armenians. On March 2 of the same year, he ordered that the decisions specified in the agreement be strictly adhered to and that there should be no illegal collection of customs taxes and road tolls from merchants involved in trade. He also ordered that transportation means, guides, inns, depots, and land plots for the construction of houses be provided for them. A similar decision was taken on May 14, 1711, in the Senate.<sup>96</sup>

The Russian government granted rights and privileges not only to the Armenian merchants but also to merchants from Transcaucasus, Turkey, and other places. On February 5, 1712, the Tiflis merchants Mamajan, Avtandil, and Harutiun, requested Peter I for his permission to use the privileges bestowed upon the New Julfa merchants. In this regard, on February 12, 1712, the Senate issued a special decree.<sup>97</sup>

Peter I also attempted to establish Armenian trade colonies in a number of Caucasian provinces as well as southern Russia. One such important colony was Astrakhan, whose entire trade, according to British travelers, John Elden and Menko Graham, was under the control of the Armenians, and to a lesser extent, the Indians.<sup>98</sup> As far as the Russian merchants were concerned, they mainly engaged in the trade of the expensive fish (sturgeon) and caviar of the Caspian Sea and Volga.<sup>99</sup>

It is interesting to note that during his visit to Amsterdam, Peter I became acquainted with prominent Armenian merchants, among them Petros Apro and Hovhannes Dirogozhian. The Russian archives indicate that in 1711, Peter I permitted the Armenian merchant Merkul Aghazarov to move to Moscow from Amsterdam with his family.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup>Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v pervoi treti 18v., tom 2, ch. 1, (Erevan, 1964), p. VII.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.60-61.

<sup>98</sup>H. Kiwrdean, *John Eldeni ew Menkoy Grahami ugheworut'iwne Parskastan 1739.* [Journey of John Elden and Menko Graham to Persia in 1739], arandznatip [special edition], p. 6.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup>Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v pervoi treti 18v., document No. 42.

When in 1717, Peter I visited Holland for the second time, Petros Apro presented him with a petition for free trade in Russia. Welcoming his request, on January 28, 1717, the Tsar decreed that the Armenian merchants of Smyrna were to be given permission to conduct free trade in Russia, and through Russia, with Western Europe, by paying the same amount of tax specified for the Armenian merchants of New Julfa. In other words, Peter I extended the same rights and privileges to the Smyrna merchants that had been given to the Armenian merchants of Julfa. Thereafter, on June 6, 1719, Peter I issued a new decree by which the Julfa and Astrakhan Armenian merchants were granted the same rights as the merchants of other countries.<sup>101</sup>

Peter I made specific major efforts for the promotion of the Iranian silk in Russia. In 1715, he ordered his ambassador, Volinski, who was leaving for Iran, that in order to convince the Shah to make the merchants of New Julfa Armenian Trade Company fulfil the provisions of the agreement with the Russian government he should pay bribes if necessary, to the Shah and the people in his circle.

This order caused problems for the Armenian merchants exporting silk abroad to Smyrna and Aleppo.<sup>102</sup>

Travelling through France, Peter I was amazed to see the silk production in Lyon and other cities. An Armenian named Shirvanov, who had established a silk manufacturing factory in Ghzlar, expressed the wish that silk be produced in Russia. Many other entrepreneurs followed suit. Thus, on March 13, 1710, the Armenian merchant, Safar Vasiliyev, presented a petition to the Tsar asking for a place and manpower to develop silk production in Russia. In the meantime, he requested permission to invite individuals from Iran who had mastered the art of silk production. Peter I enthusiastically welcomed the request and thus, Safar Vasiliyev established the first Russian silk factory in Terk. In 1720, another factory was setup in Astrakhan. In particular, Israel Ori and his colleague, Minas Vardapet with the permission of Peter I, invited a large number of Iranian-Armenian silk production experts to Russia.

<sup>101</sup> Hayk Ter-Astwatsatreants', *Hay vacharakanut'ivne Rusiayum*, pp. 41-43.

<sup>102</sup> *Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v pervoi treti 18v.*, document No.36, article 7.

The Russian Tsar also encouraged the establishment of trade companies to take control of the entire foreign trade of Russia and secure significant revenues for the treasury.

This was good news for the Armenian merchants. The first to establish a trade company which received the monopoly of conducting trade with Iran with the exception of military goods was Manuel Isakhanov. It is worth noting that this company was established on the basis of shareholding principles, an unprecedented first in Russia.

In the early eighteenth century not only the Iranian-Armenians, but also the Western Armenian merchants were involved in the Russian trade. After the 1695-1696 war, one of the most important issues deliberated in the negotiations between Russia and Turkey was the creation of conditions which would facilitate the Russian trade with Kaffa, Sinop and Constantinople as well as the Turkish merchants' trade with Azov, Kiev and Moscow. However, despite the promises given during the negotiations, the Ottoman government impeded the development of the Russian trade in the Black Sea basin. Undoubtedly, under such circumstances, the land routes were to gain importance for the Armenian merchants. Numerous documents testify this fact. On December 15, 1725, Lieutenant General Matiushkin asked the court's permission to accept the silver imported by the Armenian nationals of Turkey. On January 12, 1726, the Armenian merchants of Aleppo and Damascus asked for permission to conduct business with the Azov territories through Astrakhan, and import Turkish products. They also asked that they be charged the same taxes as the Julfites. The Russian government welcomed and granted their request. Thereafter, the Armenians expanded their trade to Kaffa and other cities of Taurus, from where they often crossed over to Poland, to Kamenits, Lamberd, and other cities.<sup>103</sup>

In order to transport their goods to Russia, the khojas also used their own cargo ships, to acquire which, they received permission in advance from the Russian court. The State Senate on November 17, 1769, adopted

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<sup>103</sup>Hayk Ter-Astwatsatreants', *Hay vacharakanut'iwne Ruslayum*, pp. 47-48.

a decision to "permit Armenians of Astrakhan to build naval vessels for the purpose of transporting goods across the Caspian Sea."<sup>104</sup>

During the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Russo-Iranian trade was still growing. Despite that factor, as in the past, no major changes took place in the foreign trade system of Iran, that is, the latter had even stronger trade relations with Turkey, and the Armenian merchants of Iran were also conducting business with the commercial centers in Turkey and the Levant.<sup>105</sup>

One factor contributing to continued trade with Turkey was the fact that from the beginning of the Russian-Swedish war until 1705, the export of silk from the Russian ports had come to a complete halt. Besides, as in the past century, the Armenian merchants justified their failure to fulfill the agreement by the lack of security on the Caspian-Volga route, the unlawful activities of the Russian administration and the collection of heavy customs duties under difficult conditions. Intermittent conflicts in South Russia also constituted a major obstacle. The Armenian merchants especially sustained heavy losses during the Bulavin revolt 1705-1707. Also in the North and the Baltic Seas, they were often attacked by European sea pirates. In his protest letter presented to the Russian court, Safar Vasilev, for example, mentioned that as a consequence of such attacks between 1705-1706, the pirates captured large quantities of goods belonging to the Armenian merchants and inflicted heavy losses on them as well as on the [Russian] Court. In this regard, Safar Vasilev suggested avoiding Arkhangelsk port, in favor of Novgorod and Rugodev. That protest received the attention of the Russian court, and the government of Peter I decreed that it was indispensable to welcome the Armenian merchants and allow them to export and import their goods through Rugodev and S. Petersburg, by "any vessel that they desired, even if they are Swedish."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>*Sobranie aktov, otnosiashikhsia k obozreniiu istorii armianskogo naroda*, [Collection of Acts Relating to the Review of the History of the Armenian People], (Erevan, 1938), part I, p. 27.

<sup>105</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v pervoi treti 18v.*, p. VIII.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*



Since the Armenian merchants, under no circumstances, wanted to stop using the Turkish land caravan routes, and the efforts of the Russian government to divert the export of the Iranian silk to Russia had turned out to be fruitless, Volinski attempted, during the negotiations with the Shah's government to gain permission for the Russian merchants to purchase raw silk directly from the silk producers in Gilan and Shirvan, without any intermediaries. More importantly, he wanted their rights for the purchase of silk to be recognized in Iran. Undoubtedly, all these suggestions were directed against the Armenian merchants in general, and the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company in particular which enjoyed the maximum rights over the purchase and export of the Iranian silk. However, these requests were not beneficial to Shah Sultan Hussein who decisively rejected them. The ambassador was informed that the Russian merchants had been granted permission to purchase the silk in Gilan and Shirvan, and after paying the duties, import them to Russia only under conditions of equal rights with the Iranian merchants.<sup>107</sup>

Eventually, the negotiations in Iran convinced Volinski that the Russo-Iranian treaty of 1717 was unable to create stable conditions for the future development of trade between Russia and Iran. In their turn, the New Julfa khojas began to ignore the Russo-Iranian agreement, and bypass its provisions.<sup>108</sup>

Considering all the above, Volinski began an active campaign to get the Russian government to abrogate the agreement as well as all other agreements signed between the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company and the Moscow government. Heeding his ambassador's insistence and trusting all the evidence produced by him, on June 6, 1719, Peter I issued a decree abrogating all the above agreements. However, the changes did not stop there, and the Russian government began to behave differently towards the Armenian merchants. All the efforts at "appeasement" — granting them rights and privileges as well as various cooperative measures — were replaced by the new

<sup>107</sup> TsGADA, Snosheniia Rossii s Persiei, 1716-1718g.g., No.2, l.208,233; No.3, ll. 309-310.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, No.2 pp. 586-87.



policies suggested by Volinski. The purpose of these policies was to expedite excursions to Iran and occupy that country's silk-bearing regions and, thus, conclusively resolve this complicated issue of Russo-Iranian trade-economic relations<sup>109</sup> Thus, Russo-Iranian military conflicts were increasing, in which Ottoman Turkey played an important instigating role. The latter, had been upset by the terms of the 1717 Russo-Persian treaty. The Turkish ambassador to Isfahan exerted pressure on Shah Sultan Hussein to force the Iranian merchants to shift the export of their entire silk to Turkey. And in 1721, taking advantage of the siege of Isfahan by the Afghans, which had forced the Shah's government into a thorny situation, the Turkish ambassador demanded as a final ultimatum: a) the prohibition of European merchants into the Persian Gulf; b) halting export of Iranian goods to Russia; and c) exporting the entire stock of the Iranian silk destined to Europe exclusively through Turkish trade routes. In the meantime, crudely interfering in the internal affairs of Iran, the Turkish ambassador demanded that Iran provide him with private sea vessels and restrict the Russian navigation in the Caspian Sea.<sup>110</sup> The Ottoman government's militant position towards neighboring Iran can only be explained by the fact that in 1718, its government had signed a peace treaty in Pasarovitsa with Austria. This was followed by another "eternal treaty" signed with Russia in 1720. In other words, new, favorable conditions had emerged for Turkey in the East in lieu of territorial losses which it had sustained in the West, especially in Iran whose silk-bearing regions, especially Gilan and Mazandaran were at the center of Turkey's determined attention since the distant past.

The crude policy adopted by the Russian government towards the Armenian merchants was incompatible with the economic interests of Russia. And it is no accident that after the conquest of the Caspian Sea coast region by the Russian armies, the Tsar, by his July 5, 1723, and July 8, 1725, decrees once again restored the commercial rights

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<sup>109</sup>*Armiano-russkie otnosheniia v pervoi treti 18v.*, p. XIII.

<sup>110</sup>*TsGADA, Snosheniia Rossii s Persiei v 1716-1718g.g.*, No.3, l.l. 318-319, p. 68.

and privileges of the Armenians in the region as well as in Russia. The Armenian merchant bourgeoisie immediately echoed this reversal of the Russian policy.

Throughout Russia, the Armenian merchants had established extensive commercial ties not only with the advanced Western European economic centers, but also almost all the Eastern European countries.

Of particular interest was the Armenians' trade with Poland. It is known that the first Armenian settlers arrived in Poland as early as the seventh century. The driving force behind this early migration was the three-centuries-old of Byzantine-Arab conflict (in the 7th-10th centuries), coupled with the insidious policies of the Byzantine emperors, namely the deportation of Armenians from Armenia. The first phase of mass migration included 150,000 Armenians who migrated to the Balkans, the Crimea and the Caucasian coastal regions after the Seljuks conquered and razed Ani to the ground.

In 1475, when the Turks conquered Kaffa, close to forty-five thousand Armenians of the city fled to Poland because the conquerors organized a horrible massacre of the Armenians. The depopulation of the Armenians from the Crimea had its negative impact on the trade conducted with the Black Sea coastal countries. That trade, predominantly run by the Armenian merchants, was completely disrupted.

The migration of the Armenians to Poland continued even during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century period in particular, due to the Jalali revolts, mass migrations of Western Armenians began towards the Crimea, Ukraine, and Poland. Armenian communities began to take shape in some of Poland's cities, such as Lvov (Ilov), Zamsots, Stanislav, as well as the Russian cities within the Polish control such as Vladimir-Volinski (Vlodzimezh), Lutsk, Kiev (Mankerman), Cherkasi, Zhitomir, etc. The cities of Lvov, Lutsk, and Kamenits-Podolsk in particular owe their wealth and prominence, in part to the Armenian merchants who conducted trade along the Eastern and Western routes.

Subsequent to the demise of the Italian communities of the Crimea, they played a similar role by sailing across the Black Sea.<sup>111</sup>

Significantly large Armenian populations also settled in Yazlovets, Bar, Tisemenitsa, Podhaltse, Zlochu (Zolochev), Zhvanets, Barek, Brodi, Bzhezhani, Anyatin, Lisetz, Kuti, Balta, Rachkov, Mohilov, (Mogiliov-Podolski), as well as the cities of Warsaw and Liublin.

The Polish-Armenians were involved in a variety of occupations. However, trade and crafts constituted the two main spheres. Among the Polish-Armenians, the merchant class comprised an exclusively influential segment of the population, controlling virtually all the trade conducted with the East. "In the history of the Southern cities of Russia," writes Professor I. Linnichenko, the "Armenians occupied an extremely prominent place. It can be confirmed without exaggeration that major southern cities of Russia such as Lvov, Lutsk, Kamenits-Podolsk, owe their wealth, growth, and significance exclusively to the Armenians. It was due to this ingenious, ardent, and talented entrepreneurial nation that the southern trade centers of Russia became halfway stations between the Western and Eastern trade. Familiar with the conditions of the East, and Eastern languages, well familiar with the transportation routes in the East, endowed with bravery and military skills, two indispensable characteristics during dangerous journeys . . . Armenians from ancient times became involved in the land trade between the East and the West. After the fall of the Italian communities in the Crimea, they took all the successful businesses under their control."<sup>112</sup>

The Polish-Armenians also engaged in the international trade conducted over the Black Sea and had close commercial ties, especially with Venice.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup>I. A. Linnichenko, "Cherte iz istorii soslovii v Iugo-zapadnoy Galitskoi Rusi 14-15v.v.," [Features from the History of Social Classes in South-Western Galitsian Russia in the 14th-15th Centuries], *Uchyoniye zapiski Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo universiteta*, vep. 20, (Moscow, 1894), p. 221.

<sup>112</sup>I. A. Linnich'enko, *Lehastani ew arewmtean-harawayin Rusiayi hayere* [Armenians of Poland and South-Western Russia], (Moscow, 1894), p. 3.

<sup>113</sup>Zakvzewska- Dubasova Miroslava, *Ormianie W Dawney Polsce*, Wydawnictwo (Lubelskie, 1982), pp. 9-21.

The Polish Kings, Henry Valez, Stefan Batori, Sigizmund III, Jan Kazymyr, Jan Sobieski and Stanislav August have praised the Armenians for their support of the trades and professions, as well as their services rendered in defending Poland against Turkey. For their dedicated efforts, and social activism, they granted them various rights and privileges.

Thus, in his 1505 decree, King Sigizmund exempted the Armenian merchants from the payment of taxes.<sup>114</sup>

As early as 1519, the Lvov Armenians presented the Polish king the so-called "Armenian Legislation" which played an extremely important role in the legal-political life and in determining the status of Polish-Armenians. By this document, the Armenians received judicial autonomy in the entire territory of Poland where the "common law" adopted from the West was in force. Speaking about the extraordinary broad rights of the Polish-Armenians, Polish historian Zakvzewska-Dubasova notes, that the Armenians "almost always occupied the first place, second to that of the Polish nobility."<sup>115</sup> Among the Armenian merchants there were some who occasionally loaned money to the Polish kings such as Sigizmund III, Vladislav, and others.

During the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the Eastern trade of Poland with Ottoman Turkey and Iran was conducted via Bessarabia and the Black Sea, as well as Moscow and Transcaucasus (or the Caspian Sea). Both the Iranian-Armenian khojas and the Polish-Armenian merchants involved in international trade frequented the Warsaw-Liublin-Yach-Black Sea-Transcaucasus-Iran route.<sup>116</sup> In this regard, Grigor Lusikov, during the trade negotiations conducted between Russia and Poland in Moscow, tried to secure an opportunity for the New Julfa Armenian Trade Company members to have unrestricted entry and exit to Poland, and the Polish merchants in Iran.

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<sup>114</sup>I. A. Linnich'enko, *Lehastani ew arewmtean-haravayin Rusiayi hayere.*

<sup>115</sup>Zakvzewska-Dubasova Miroslava, *Ormlanie w dawney Polsce*, p. 44.

<sup>116</sup>M. L. Hovhannisian, *Urwagtser Lehastani ew Arewmtean Ukrainayi haykakan gagh'tawayreri patmut'ean* [Sketches of History of Armenian Colonies in Poland and Western Ukraine], (Erevan, 1977), pp. 163-73.

On the road connecting Russia with Moldova and Walachia lay a number of trade centers such Warsaw, Lvov (Lemberg) and Kamenits. In these cities, as well as Moldavia, the presence of large Armenian communities (Suchava, Yassi) facilitated the activities of the Armenian merchants. From the Moldavian-Armenians they purchased mainly large horn cattle, smoked fish, wine, and so forth, part of which was reexported to Germany. German historian G. Kellenbenz, relying on archival documents, writes that in Lvov and Liublin in particular, the Armenian merchants had large trade offices, through which they acted as intermediary merchants between Poland and Russia, Poland, and Turkey, as well as between Poland and Western States.<sup>117</sup>

The Armenian khojas residing in Poland had their representatives in major commercial centers such as Constantinople, Smyrna, Isfahan, Moscow, Amsterdam, Marseilles, etc. Regarding the wealthy Lvov Armenian merchants, Simeon Lehats'i writes: "... They were major and prominent merchants who had their representatives and attorneys in Istanbul, Ankara, Isfahan, Moscow, Gdansk, Portugal, and so forth. Among them there were khojas whose wealth was estimated to be about 50,000, 60,000, 80,000, and 100,000 ghurush or more. They owned palaces, lands, vineyards, fruit trees, orchards and nurseries, flowers, plants, and fields which included lakes filled with fish, some with amazing ponds."<sup>118</sup>

In the course of their trade with Poland, the Armenian merchants, along with the Russian trade routes, also used the Turkish caravan routes. According to the European travelers, the Armenians brought Iranian goods via the land routes to Constantinople and from there transported them to Bogdania, that is Moldova, and through Poland distributed them in Denmark, Sweden, and other countries. They also noted that the revenue generated "in light of the dangers involved,

<sup>117</sup>G. Kellenbens, "Kontinentalnaya trgovlia mezhdv vostochnoi i zapadnoi Evropoi v 15v. do nachala epokhi zheleznikh dorog." [Continental Trade Between Eastern and Western Europe in the 15th Century Prior to the Epoch of Railways], 5 *mezhdunarodnii congress ekonomicheskoi istorii*, Leningrad, 10-14 avgusta, 1970g., (Moscow, 1970), p. 9.

<sup>118</sup>*Simeon dpri Lehats'woy Ughegrut'wvn*, p. 338.



as some Armenians, whom I met in Tabriz and also in Trebizond, told me<sup>119</sup> was low due to the high expenses involved.

Thus, the Armenian merchants of the Crimea, Ukraine, and Poland maintained close contacts with Turkey, Trebizond, Tokhat, Erzurum, and Constantinople, as well as Iran, thus "forming a network for the Eastern-European and Asian markets."<sup>120</sup>

The Polish-Armenians with commercial interests traveled all the way to China, and in the West to Genoa, and Portugal. From the South Caucasian commercial centers, they preferred Erevan, Etchmiadzin, Gandzak, Shamakhi, etc.

Poland's trade with the East had a special significance for the economic development of its southern neighbors, i.e., Hungary and Romania. Zakvzewska-Dubasova rightly states that "the unique character of Poland's trade with the East was the fact that it almost entirely was in the hands of Armenians. . . . Polish and Russian merchants could not compete with Armenian merchants."<sup>121</sup>

The same writer, referring to a number of other historians, notes, the thirty to forty per cent of the Armenian population of Lvov engaged in professions and crafts. He implies that the Eastern trade and craftsmanship was able to grow only with the help of Armenian artisans.<sup>122</sup>

H. Kiurdian believes that the Armenians were the first to bring silk to Poland, and introduced the Poles to sericulture.<sup>123</sup> They imported Eastern spices, frankincense, pepper, luxury items, expensive carpets, sky-blue velvets, ladies Damascian garments, red taffetas, Kashmir scarves and shawls, delicate silk textiles, and so forth to Poland.<sup>124</sup> "Armenians settled in the cities neighboring Lvov and Eastern Poland were engaged in trade and commerce between Poland

<sup>119</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'iwnner*, p. 348.

<sup>120</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner* . . . , p. 426.

<sup>121</sup>Zakvzewska-Dubasova Miroslava, *Ormianie w dawney* . . . , p. 125.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>123</sup>H. Kiurdian, *Gorge hayots' mej*, p. 84.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*



and the Eastern countries. They imported goods from Turkey, Syria, Arabia, Egypt, and even India. The entire valuable commerce of the East was under their control."<sup>125</sup>

The Polish historian, V. Lozinsky, writes that some Eastern products in Lvov were called "Armenian goods." First and foremost, they were luxury items: carpets, gold-woven textiles, silverware and goldware, horse trimmings, weapons decorated with engravings and inlaid with precious stones, leopard skins, and so forth. In the Polish customs tariffs, items such as wine, spices, i.e., pepper, safran, carnation, raisin, rice, tropical fruits, olive, coffee, and tea were also listed as "Armenian goods."<sup>126</sup> Having migrated from Theodosia to Zamosts, the Armenian Muratovich, acquired the necessary permit and locally organized manufacturing of Persian rugs. In fact, the establishment of the city of Zamosts was entirely a result of the trade with, and craftsmanship of, the East. One of the wealthiest merchants of Zamosts was Grigorovich who left his heirs a legacy worth nine hundred thousand zlot.<sup>127</sup>

Polish historians also state that the presence of the Armenians in the Polish cities not only enriched *Rech Pospolita's* material culture, but also its intellectual culture.<sup>128</sup>

As mentioned above, the Armenian merchants were also involved in large-scale trade with Moldova. Two trade routes crossed that country which connected the Western European countries with the East. One of those routes, called the Moldavian Trade Route, connected Krakow and Lvov to the Black Sea, crossing Albia of Chetat, Suchava, Siret, and Bland. The other was called the Tatar Trade Route, which crossed through Lukki and Vladimir towards the coastal towns of the Crimea.

Romanian Professor E. Anjelesku, in his *Economic History of Romania*, writes: "If the Romanians during the flourishing period of

<sup>125</sup>Pronislawa K'eobriwlean, *Lehastani hayere*, [Armenians of Poland], *Sion*, July, 1934, pp. 213-14.

<sup>126</sup>Zakvewska-Dubasova Miroslava, *Ormianie w dawney . . .*, pp.130. W. Lozinski, "Patrycyeti Mieszczanstwo," *Airenik*, vol.7, no.10, p. 92.

<sup>127</sup>Zakvewska-Dubasova Miroslava, *Ormianie w dawney . . .*, p. 147.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 223.

their ancient trade learned about the Black Sea, and even penetrated the Mediterranean through the straits, that should not be attributed to the Italians, but rather to the Armenian merchants who knew the East very well. They played a major role in the genesis of Romanian trade and the formation of its urban settlements."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>E. Anjelesku, *Ruminneru intesakan patmut'iwne* (from A. G. Abrahamian, *Hamarot urwagits hay gagh't'awayreri patmut'ean*, vol.1), p. 341.

## The Trade Relations of the Armenians with India, and the Far Eastern and Southeast Asian Countries

Since time immemorial, the settlers of the Araxes valley have played an important role in the Asian trade. The Armenian merchants had been in contact with India since ancient times.<sup>1</sup> Armenia was situated on the major trade route to India, due to which, the Armenian merchants were familiar with the roads leading to India. Even Xenophon in his *Cyropaedia* says that the Persian king, Cyrus the Great, in the sixth century BC, wanting to dispatch an ambassador to India, called upon the Armenians and asked them to be the guides for his delegation.<sup>2</sup> The Armenians accepted the task and pledged to accomplish it, having also in mind the establishment of trade relations with Persia through mediation with the Indian king.

A wealthy Armenian merchant named Tomas Cana was one of the first Armenians to settle in India. He built a small town near Madras, with churches and schools.<sup>3</sup>

Until the advent of the Europeans in India, i.e., the Portuguese, English, French and Dutch, trade between the countries near and far

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<sup>1</sup>R. Abrahamian, "Anwank' k'aghak'ats' hndkats' ew parsits," [Names of the Towns in India and Persia], *Banber Matenadaran*, no. 4, (Erevan, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>Leo, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu*, 5-rd hator, p. 507.

<sup>3</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 469.

was conducted through the land routes, by caravans. The Armenians, among others, had a major hide in these trade relations. Before the discovery of the sea routes to India, the Armenians had already accessed the major bustling trade centers of India, and were engaged in extensive trade via the caravan routes. They arrived in Kabul, from where they traveled to India via the Kandahar-Lahor-Delhi trade route.<sup>4</sup>

There is also evidence available that in the early twelfth century, the Armenians purchased precious stones, medicinal herbs and other goods in India.

Beginning with the sixteenth century, groups of Armenian merchants established settlements in major cities on the crossroads of the Iran and Afghanistan caravan routes. Kostand Jughayets'i mentions the towns of Qazvin, Balkh, Bukhara, Meshad, Kandahar, and Kabul, where the Armenian merchants conducted trade. One of the major trade routes of the East passed through these major commercial "nerve centers".<sup>5</sup>

As early as the 1670s, there were Armenian communities comprising mainly merchants and artisans, established in Kabul and Kandahar.<sup>6</sup> However, the khojas almost exclusively were involved in the trade of Indian goods, since the Afghan towns did not produce goods worthy of export.<sup>7</sup>

Emperor Akbar the Great (1556-1605) of the Moghul dynasty in India, wishing to boost the domestic and foreign trade of his state, granted a series of rights and privileges to the Armenian merchants,<sup>8</sup> which included permission to enter the regions prohibited to foreigners. Taking advantage of these exclusive rights, the Armenian merchants, established trade houses in the newly founded capital of Agra (Akbarabad), and in 1562, among other things, constructed a

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<sup>4</sup>James Russell, "Hayeren erku ardzanagrut'iwn Pakistani Ziarat' k'aghak'its," [Two Armenian Inscriptions from Pakistani Town of Ziarat], *Patmabanasirakan Handes*, no.3(126) (1989), pp. 205-07.

<sup>5</sup>M. Mashots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. No.5994, 1a-b.

<sup>6</sup>M. Seth, *History of the Armenians in India*, (Calcutta, 1895) p. 187.

<sup>7</sup>T. Gushakean, *Hndkahayk' [Armenians of India]*, (Jerusalem, 1941), p. 233.

<sup>8</sup>M. Seth, *History of the Armenians* . . . , p. 11.

church.<sup>9</sup> The Armenian merchants also established trade communities in many other Indian cities.<sup>10</sup> In Koṣṭand Jughayetsi's *Ashkharhazhoghov*, the names of thirty Indian cities are mentioned where there were either established Armenian communities or traces of their presence. He writes:

They [Armenians] were going from East to West. First, they stopped in Mltan (Multan), 2. Lahor, 3. Sarhind, 4. Jahanabad, 5. Akbarabad, 6. Khurja and Hndwan, 7. Bankala, 8. Biharpatana, 9. Benares, 10. Mov, 11. Ghazipur, 12. Jalalpur, 13. Shahzadpur, 14. Kherabad, 15. Daryabad, 16. Doulatabad, 17. Srenj (Suraj), 18. Beranpurn (Burhanpur), 19. Surat, 20. Gujarat, 21. Orangabad, 22. Shagarh, which is in Dakan (Deccan), 23. Hyderabad, 24. Mushli Bandar, 25. Pegu . . .<sup>11</sup>

Armenian communities were established in Agra, Surat, Burhanvar (Bhanwar), Patna, Chinsurah, Bihar, Hugly, Kashmir, Benares, Lahor, Delhi, Saidabad, Madras, Bombay, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Dacca, and many other cities.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the penetration of the English into India, a portion of the interior and foreign trade of the country was in the hands of the Iranian-Armenian merchants.<sup>13</sup>

However, it is important to note that land trade with India faced major difficulties and obstacles. First, the caravans had to cross vast distances, and difficult terrain and mountain passes, inhabited by numerous militant tribes, for whom looting and banditry was a way of life and the major means of survival. The efforts of the Safavid kings of Iran as well as the rulers of India to make the roads safe proved to be fruitless.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India* . . . . C. Martin, *The Armenian Community in India*, a.t. (special edition), 1958.

<sup>11</sup>M. Mashots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. No.5994, 3a-3b.

<sup>12</sup>C. Martin, *The Armenians* . . . , pp. 1-2, 11.

<sup>13</sup>S. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Materiale po istorii armianskoi kolonii Indii*, [Materials on the History of the Armenian Community in India], *Nauchñie trudy Erevanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, vol. 13, (Erevan, 1949), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Riazul Islām, *Indo-Persian Relations: A Study of the Political and Diplomatic Relations Between the Mughal Empire and Iran*, (Tehran, 1970), p. 172

Until the discovery of the sea routes to India, the merchants of the Western countries, conducted trade with India mainly through the Eastern merchants, the Armenian merchants, in particular. However, trade through intermediaries was not profitable for them and this, significantly accelerated their search for sea routes to India.

After the discovery of the sea route, the Armenian merchants also began to express interest in this new trade route. Subsequent to the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope the land trade route was transferred to the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean, as a result of which the land trade conducted via the Asian ports of the Mediterranean and the Near East lost its significance.

The significance of the Persian Gulf as a route for international trade between the East and the West, immediately increased. Thereafter, this path was mainly used to send the Western exports to China, Malaysian Archipelago, and India.

By 1506, the Portuguese had begun the conquest of major Persian Gulf seaports. In 1515, the famous explorer Alfonso d'Albuquerque occupied the Hormuz Island that constituted the key to the Gulf, and built a fortress there. Thereafter, the Portuguese established full control over the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean in general, and began creating obstacles for the navigation and merchant shipping of other European powers in the Gulf basin. This made the trade activities of the Iranian and Arab merchants extremely difficult, affecting their trade with India, in particular.

There is also interesting evidence available about the fact that the Armenian merchants were subject to similar treatment as well. As early as 1563, Don Sebastian had invoked a law which created problems for Armenians, Greeks, and Persians visiting Portugal.<sup>15</sup> The law stipulated that in the city of Lisbon or any place in the Portuguese kingdom for that matter, "individuals who by their outfit, language and customs appeared to be Armenians, Greeks, Persians or other nationalities, who were nationals of Turkey, be arrested, so

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<sup>15</sup>R. V. Gulbenkian, *Hay-portugalakan haraberut'iwinner*, p. 54.



that their identity, the purpose of their visit and kind of trade can be investigated, including the length of their stay."

In 1596, King Philip II of Spain ordered the viceroy of India, Francesco de Gama, to "oversee the strict implementation of the orders given to the commander of Hormuz, and ban the entering of the Venetians, Armenians, and other foreigners to India."<sup>16</sup>

King Tahmasp of the Safavids who ascended to the throne in 1524-1576, during his over fifty years rule was unable to run a successful campaign against the Portuguese.<sup>17</sup> The uninterrupted Turkish invasions of Iran enabled the Portuguese to continue their rule in the Persian Gulf.

The economic and political interests of Safavid Iran in the early seventeenth century demanded the transfer of the country's foreign trade from the traditional caravan routes of Turkey to the South, i.e., the Persian Gulf that was Shah Abbas' "divine" aspiration. However, the Shah's numerous efforts to come to an agreement with the Portuguese to allow unhindered export of Iranian goods from the Gulf by the sea route, failed to materialize. Deprived of a naval fleet, and especially concerned about the adverse consequences if he were to declare war on the Portuguese, i.e., the resumption of a military campaign against Iran by Turkey, Shah Abbas refrained from any decisive operations against the Portuguese. Another factor which deterred him was the fact that in 1580, Portugal and Spain had been united by a royal decree which required that should the interests of either country be threatened, both countries would confront it jointly.

It needs to be mentioned that the Persian Gulf interested the Shah Abbas I not only for military-strategic reasons, but also for trade-economic considerations. The fact of the matter is that the silk trade, which brought huge sums to the royal treasury, was mainly conducted via the territory of Iran's arch enemy, Turkey. Meanwhile, sporadic domestic problems and animosities which often occurred among the pashas, the customs officials' arbitrary behavior, the lack of security

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup>*Frahangi joghrafi'i Iran*, jeld 3, Tehran, 1335/1956, p. 15.

for the caravan routes, and the almost constant wars between Turkey and Iran hampered Iran's foreign trade, and made the Safavid state dependent on the whims of its competitor. Shah Abbas' court historian, Iskandar Munshi has recounted a number of incidents of the Turkish authorities confiscating properties, even of the Shah himself. "Ahmad Pasha (the governor of Van), he [Iskandar Monshi] wrote in 1602, publicly defamed by theft of the property of one of the merchants of Khasse-Sharife, killed him and expropriated his entire possessions."<sup>18</sup>

These circumstances led Shah Abbas to look for new routes for the realization of Iran's foreign trade of which the sea routes crossing via the Persian Gulf were more feasible and productive. In the sixteenth century, although the Persian Gulf was an operational commercial route, it was second in significance to the land routes across Turkey for the foreign trade of Iran. In this regard, we have available information from the travelogues of the Venetian travelers, written during their visits to Iran in the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the Shah dreamed of changing the situation and turning the Persian Gulf into an important trade route for Iran. The realization of that plan not only would generate huge revenues for the Iranian treasury, it would also be considerably beneficial in political terms. In particular, the Safavid kingdom would be able to inflict major damage on the economy of its rival, the Ottoman Empire by stopping the export of Iranian goods and silk by the caravan routes of Turkey. This would also provide more freedom for Iran in dealing with its neighbor. Furthermore, the realization of this plan would contribute to the development of the central provinces of the Safavid state, the capital Isfahan in particular, which constituted one of the main concerns and goals of the Shah's domestic policy.

This grand plan of huge proportions was to be implemented in phases. Its first phase included the forced deportation of Armenians from Armenia. Russian historian I. P. Petrushevski rightly notes that

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<sup>18</sup>Iskandar bek Torkman, *Tarikh alam araye Abbasi*, p. 440.

<sup>19</sup>H. Hakobean, *Ughegrut'iwinner*, p. 348.

Shah Abbas wished to transfer the center of the international silk trade from [Old] Julfa to Iran and, therefore, to shift the direction of the trade of the goods via Isfahan toward the Persian Gulf.<sup>20</sup>

The second phase of the above mentioned plan was the expulsion of the Europeans from the seaports of the Persian Gulf, and consequently the opening of the routes towards the international waters.

It is assumed that the policy of re-routing Iran's foreign trade towards the Persian Gulf was welcomed by, and suited, the objectives of Shah Abbas' military-strategic advisors, the British Sherley brothers. It should be noted that the deportation of Armenians was implemented on their advice.<sup>21</sup>

This view is anchored on the evidence that the British, since the mid-fifteenth century, made active attempts to penetrate the Iranian market with the intention of establishing control over Iran's trade. To achieve this objective, it was indispensable for them to drive the Portuguese out of the Persian Gulf and take over the trade conducted via the Hormuz.<sup>22</sup>

The available documents reveal that Shah Abbas had envisioned all the major obstacles in the way of the realization of his idea. First, the Persian Gulf, although an operational trade route had secondary significance for Iran's foreign trade, compared to the land routes going through Turkey.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, it was essential to turn it into a frequently utilized and highly prioritized route. At the time, Persian merchants generally were not involved in international trade, maritime trade in particular. The only solution to this problem, in the Shah's opinion, was the use of the Armenian merchants, who not only had wide experience in the intercontinental trade, but also, since the beginning of the sixteenth century, had been engaged in maritime trade. However, that task was exacerbated by the blockade of the Persian Gulf by the Portuguese.

<sup>20</sup>I. P. Petrushevski, *Ocherki po istorii feodalnikh . . .*, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>A. Hovhannisian, *Drwagner . . .*, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations . . .*, vol. III, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup>Arnold T. Wilson, *The Persian Gulf*, (London, 1954), pp. 128-29.

The immense significance of these broad political plans compelled the Shah to resort to bold steps. He initiated military operations against the Portuguese, and between 1601-1602, conquered the Bahrain islands.<sup>24</sup> Despite threats by the Spanish, he did not return them. However, the pace of the accomplishments was interrupted for a while in 1603, due to Iran's successive wars already underway against Turkey. This war, during which the export of silk over Asia Minor was made extremely difficult, eventually convinced the Shah that the opening of the Persian Gulf for trade was vital for the Safavid kingdom.

Subsequent to the 1604 mass deportation of the Armenians from Armenia, their settling down near Isfahan, and the establishment of New Julfa in its vicinity, the Shah began to encourage the Armenian *khojas'* trade via the Persian Gulf. However, the task was made difficult by the hostile policies of the Portuguese against all their competitors in the Gulf, among them the Armenian merchants. In particular, they did not allow the Armenian merchants to enter into direct trade contacts with foreign merchants. The Portuguese compelled them to pay arbitrary taxes, and often persecuted them.<sup>25</sup> The Portuguese aimed to harm the Iranian commercial interests, force the Shah to return the Bahrain islands, and impose Catholicism on the Armenian merchants, thus, turning them into their functionaries in Iran.

Finding themselves in such difficult situation, the Armenian merchants, whose interests had suffered immensely, asked the Catholicos Melikset of Etchmiadzin to appeal on their behalf to the Pope, and ask the latter to intervene and mediate on their behalf to the king of Spain, who could intercede with the Portuguese. In his letter, Catholicos wrote:

In the town of Vermut (Hormuz), located in the Persian Gulf where Christian merchants are engaged in trade, they are charged twice the amount of taxes that are charged to non-Christians. This causes major losses to them.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>R. Vadala, *Le Golfe Persique*, (Paris, 1920), p. 14.

<sup>25</sup>Abghasem Sohab, *Tarikh zendegani Shah Abbas . . .*, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup>*Handes Amsoreay*, p. 238.

During the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the British naval fleet began an active campaign to expel the Portuguese from the Indian Ocean basin. The first victory was achieved in 1588 when the British defeated the Portuguese in the Gulf.<sup>27</sup>

The unprecedented enhancement of the activity of the British resulted in a fateful turning point in the Spanish policy towards Iran. The Spanish King, Philip III, in 1602, and 1607, sent ambassadors to Iran, suggesting the signing of an alliance treaty. Intending to encourage Shah Abbas, through his ambassador Antonio de Gouvea, the king declared that the Spanish fleet stationed in the Mediterranean was ready to give a devastating blow to the Turks.<sup>28</sup> Later, Philip III, through his ambassador in Naples, Comte de Benavent, presented a written offer in which he gave his consent for the export of the Iranian silk through the Gulf, as envisioned by the Shah, in the meantime promising to show cooperation.<sup>29</sup>

The offer caught the Shah's attention. He sent a delegation, authorizing it to conduct negotiations with the Spanish king on his behalf. It left for Europe in 1608, and included Khoja Safar, the son of Yedigar, a wealthy merchant from Julfa. Safar was considered the Shah's advisor in the royal commercial matters, silk export in particular, and was engaged in the trade of khass-esharife, i.e., the sale of the royal goods.<sup>30</sup>

Since the delegation was to depart for Spain via a sea route, i.e., the Persian Gulf, the Shah gave Safar fifty bales of raw silk. This was to initiate the export of silk through this new route. However, this first attempt aimed towards the opening of the new sea route ended in absolute failure. First, clashes took place between Khoja Safar and Dengiz Beg, a member of the delegation. The cause of this clash was the latter's forced takeover of the fifty bales of raw silk given to Safar by the Shah for presentation to the King of Spain as a gift. In protest,

<sup>27</sup>G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. II, (London, 1892), p. 418.

<sup>28</sup>A. Gouvea, *Histoire orientale des grande . . .*, pp. 207, 467-68.

<sup>29</sup>Nasrollah Falasafi, *Zendegani shah Abbas avval*, vol. 4, p. 178.

<sup>30</sup>G. Berchet, *La Repubblica di Venezia . . .*, pp. 203-85. P.L. Zekian, Khoja Safar' Shah Abbasi despan Venetiki mej [Khoja Safar, the Ambassador of Shah Abbas in Venice], *Patma-Banasirakan Handes*, 1983, no. 1, p. 111.



the Khoja left the delegation and began separate negotiations in the European capitals.

The only accomplishment of Khoja Safar was that, first, he acquired a general idea about the situation in Europe, and, later, succeeded in striking a deal with the Republic of Venice to expand the Armenian merchants' trade in that city-state. In fact, there is evidence that subsequent to that, the visits of the merchants of New Julfa to Venice became more frequent, and their commercial activities grew considerably.<sup>31</sup>

The first failure did not discourage the Shah. In 1615, he dispatched a new delegation to Spain, this time headed by the Englishman Robert Sherley. However, the latter's negotiations also ended in complete failure.

In 1615, near Surat the British naval fleet inflicted a devastating defeat on the "invincible armada" of the Portuguese.<sup>32</sup> Subsequent to that development, Shah Abbas concluded that the Portuguese were no longer capable of holding their positions in the East where the strong presence of Britain was becoming a principal political factor. Therefore, when in 1615, the English East India Company sent its representatives, Richard Steele and John Grovder, to Isfahan to sign a trade agreement, the Shah immediately welcomed the proposition and issued a firman (order) by which the British merchants were permitted to open their trade houses in Jask, Shiraz, and Isfahan. Based on the same firman, the British merchants were also given a broad range of rights and permits in the sphere of commerce.<sup>33</sup> Three years later, in 1618, the Shah signed a trade agreement with the English East India company's representatives, Giels Hopes and Thomas Barker, according to which, the company obtained the monopoly for the purchase and sale of Iran's entire silk production.<sup>34</sup> By this agreement, the British

<sup>31</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 419.

<sup>32</sup>G. Birdwood, and W. Foster, *The Register of Letters of the Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies (1600-1619)*, (London, 1893), p. 458.

<sup>33</sup>Roger Savori, *Iran under the Safavids*, pp. 113, 195.

<sup>34</sup>Moghtadem Gholam Hosein, *Kelidi khaliji Fars*, (Tehran, 1333/1954), p. 25.



were obliged to conduct the export of silk exclusively through the sea route, and cease their exports via Asia Minor. The English were also granted the right to free transport of goods in the entire territory of the Safavid kingdom, and were exempted from customs duties.

Subsequent to the signing of the Anglo-Iranian agreement, the sale of silk to the Spanish and the Portuguese ceased completely.<sup>35</sup>

The 1618 agreement was an internationally unilateral act. By this agreement, the British achieved a major entry into the Iranian market, thereby paving way for its monopolization. The British business circles assumed that the agreement would help guarantee huge profits, by making them the only intermediaries between Europe and Asia in the area of sea trade, and also turn Iran into a broad market for the British goods.

Thus, in reality, the trade monopoly of the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf seemed to have ended completely, resulting in the opening of the sea routes to India and Europe. This was, of course, encouraging to the Armenian khojas. However, that enthusiasm was short-lived. It became clear that a new and strong competitor, Great Britain, had emerged. While Giels Hopes and Thomas Barker were conducting the negotiations with the representatives of the Shah, the Armenian merchants tried to intervene and disrupt the signing of the Anglo-Iranian agreement.<sup>36</sup>

The Armenian khojas realized that the acquisition of the monopoly over the export of Iranian silk by the British would be detrimental to them. Furthermore, they knew well that they could not compete with England, which had a powerful commercial fleet and navy. The Armenian merchants realized that their strength lay in the overland caravan trade, where they had no competitors.

In order to prevent the British from gaining a monopoly over the export of silk, the khojas decided to use a steep increase in the price of silk as weapon. First, they appealed to the Shah, asking him to revoke the agreement signed with the British. In return, they

<sup>35</sup>Bayandor, *Khaliji Fars*, (Tehran, 1317/1938), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup>K. Bayani, *Les relations de l'Iran avec l'Europe* . . . , pp. 116-18.

guaranteed that they would support the export and sale of all the Iranian silk. The Shah's reply was that whoever paid him more, would get the right of export monopoly.<sup>37</sup> Thus, on September 14, 1619, an auction was announced in which the European merchants as well as those from other countries in the East participated.

According to Pietro della Valle, a participant in the auction, of all the European and Eastern merchants, only the khojas of Julfa offered 50 gold tuman for each bale (36 batman) of silk.<sup>38</sup>

The Shah immediately declared null and void the agreement signed with the English and gave the monopoly over the purchase and export of all the Iranian silk to the Armenians. In the meantime, he granted to the khojas the unique right and monopoly to conduct the royal goods trade, known as *Tajire khass-e sharife*<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the efforts and proactive policy of the khojas culminated in the desired end. This victory strengthened the ties between the Armenian merchant class, the khojas, with the royal court, and the Safavid kingdom's civil bureaucracy. The Armenians of New Julfa turned into the royal merchant counter agents. Testifying in that regard, Tavernier writes, that subsequently, " Foreign trade of Iran was concentrated completely in the hands of Armenians, who constituted the king's and the nobility's functionaries.<sup>40</sup> Pietro della Valle also observes: "The Julfites for the Shah were what the Genoese were for the king of Spain. They could not live without the king, neither could the king live without them."<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the first attempt of the English to establish themselves in the Iranian markets concluded in complete failure. The Shah canceled the agreement signed with the English East India Company.

The most surprising outcome was the fact that the Armenian khojas emerged as victors: they were the representatives of those people

<sup>37</sup>Nasrollah Falsafi, *Tarikh ravabeti Iran va orupa dar doreye Safaviye, ghesmati avval*, (Tehran, 1937), pp. 68, 145.

<sup>38</sup>Pietro Della Valle, *Reiss-Beschrei bung in unterchiedlichen . . .*, p. 263.

<sup>39</sup>Nasrollah Falsafi, *Zendagani shah Abbas avval*, vol. 3, p. 220.

<sup>40</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, vol. II, p. 325.

<sup>41</sup>Pietro Della Valle, *Reiss-Beschrei bund in unterchiedlichen . . .*, p. 265.

deprived of a state, who only a few years earlier had been uprooted from their ancestral homeland, and driven out to the interiors of Iran. The explanation for this incomprehensible issue seems to be that as a rule, the Armenian merchants involved in the international trade, were satisfied with smaller profits, whereas the English East India Company, which had become used to the immense profits earned from the Indian trade, and generally had larger appetites, entered only those contracts where they were certain of huge profits. For example, there is evidence available that on occasions, the East India Company earned profits in excess of three hundred and forty per cent from business transactions.<sup>42</sup>

From the first day of the implementation of the agreement signed in 1618, dissension began to emerge between the royal government and the English, since it became clear that the "Honorable Company" was preparing to make all the payments for the silk by different English products, whereas the government demanded payments only in precious metals. Hence, the English increased the prices of their goods, and in the meantime lowered the price of the raw silk.<sup>43</sup>

The Shah's opposition to the English was also due to the fact that, it soon became clear to the Shah that the English did not justify his hopes of organizing the export of silk via the sea routes.<sup>44</sup> Of course, there were reasons for this. First, the maritime trade through the Gulf was risky, and dangerous, thus, prone to great losses, since the Portuguese and the Spanish continued their confrontational stance against the English. Also, since the Iranian silk producing regions were located exclusively in the north of the country, it was difficult for the English to bring the goods to the Persian Gulf over the desert routes through vast territories of the huge country. Unlike the Armenian merchants, the English had no experience in caravan trade—they had never been involved in trade of that kind.

<sup>42</sup>Gibbins, *Ocherk istorii angliyskoi torgovli i colonii* (Sketch of the History of English Trade and Colonies), (S. Petersburg, 1899), p. 8

<sup>43</sup>H. Kiwrdean, *Niw'er vacharakanut'ean patmut'ean*, pp. 190-11.

<sup>44</sup>Pouillet, *Nouvelles relations du Levant, partie, I, II*, (Paris, 1667), pp. 413-16. Sanson, *Voyage ou Relation de l'etat . . .*, p. 157.

In general, the English, at the beginning of the seventeenth century were not accustomed to the type of trade conducted in the East. Hence, the English East India Company advised its employees to learn the Armenian language and techniques of conducting business, etc. For that purpose, they were even advised to reside in the houses of the Armenian khojas of New Julfa.<sup>45</sup>

John Fryer, an employee of the English East India Company, in an account about the Armenian merchants, writes that they could travel with 50 shillings to places where the English could not travel with 50 tumans.<sup>46</sup>

There is no doubt, that in making a choice between the English and the Armenians, the Shah had to give priority to the latter. First, the khojas constituted his subjects, whereas in the case of the English, he lacked any control over their activities. Therefore, the Shah made a multifaceted economic and political plan with the Armenian merchants. That was the reason why Shah Abbas I as well as his successors preferred to export the raw silk and sell it directly through the services of the Armenian merchants.<sup>47</sup>

Another fact that benefited the Armenian merchants, to the loss of the English East India Company, was the commander in chief of the army, Allahverdi Khan, and commander Gharchkha Khan were Armenians by descent and had played a glorious role during the victorious campaigns of Shah Abbas I against Ottoman Turkey.<sup>48</sup>

All these factors made the omnipotent East India Company defer its plan of exporting silk via the Persian Gulf.

Thus, the plans of Shah Abbas I to export the Iranian silk through the Persian Gulf instead of the Turkish routes did not produce positive results. Neither did the first attempts of the English to establish themselves in the Iranian markets. Defending their commercial interests, the Armenian merchants actively opposed the penetration of the foreign merchants into Iran.

<sup>45</sup>L. Lockart, *The Fall of the Safavi Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, (Cambridge, 1958), p. 370.

<sup>46</sup>John Fryer, *A New Account of East India and Persia, 1672-1681*, vol. II, (Nendeln, 1967), pp. 249-50.

<sup>47</sup>*Novaia istoriia stran zarubezhnogo vostoka*, t.1, p. 86.

<sup>48</sup>H. F. Farmayan, *The Beginnings of Modernization in Iran . . .*, pp. 21-22.

In the 1620s, the British government unleashed a vigorous campaign to solidify its monopoly rule in the Persian Gulf. On December 28, 1620, the English naval fleet gave a devastating blow to the Portuguese fleet near Jask. On the agenda was the conquest of Hormuz by which access from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean would be sealed.

Since the fifteenth century, Hormuz constituted one of the major commercial centers of the Persian Gulf, where, according to contemporaries "the merchants of seven different climates" met. The Venetian Marco Polo was familiar with the wealth of Hormuz as early as the thirteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

The following Portuguese quote, regarding Hormuz reads: "If the world were a gold ring, then Hormuz would be its diamond."

Regarding Hormuz, the interests of Iran and England coincided. Shah Abbas aspired to become the recipient of the silk profits of Hormuz. On one occasion, he said that "even if he had to sacrifice half of his kingdom, he had to conquer Hormuz."<sup>50</sup> On February 8, 1622, an agreement was signed between the East India Company and Iran to expand military operations against the Portuguese.<sup>51</sup> On April 22, 1622, the forces of Imam Quli Khan, the governor of Fars province, with the help of the warships of the English East India Company, occupied Hormuz.<sup>52</sup> Shah Abbas razed the fortress of Hormuz, and transferred its commercial port to Gombroon, which was renamed "Bandar Abbas" (Abbas' seaport) in his honor.

Thus, the Persian Gulf was opened to the merchants of all nations. According to the Englishman Thomas Herbert, the port of Gombroon, in a short time, became a major commercial city, thanks to the maritime trade of the English, Dutch, Portuguese, Armenian, Indian, Arab, Jewish and Turkish merchants and those of other nationalities.<sup>53</sup> The opening

<sup>49</sup>M. Polo, *Knigi Marco Polo* [Books of Marco Polo], (Moscow, 1955), pp. 65, 184, 194.

<sup>50</sup>R. V. Gulbenkian, *Hay-portugalakan . . .*, p. 120.

<sup>51</sup>W. Foster, *England's Quest of Eastern Trade*, (London, 1933), p. 312.

<sup>52</sup>*The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 5, (Cambridge, 1932), p. 82.

<sup>53</sup>Thomas Herbert, *Travels in Persia*, (New York, 1929), p. 43



of the Persian Gulf gave a new boost to the Armenian merchants' maritime trade with India.<sup>54</sup> Till then, their ties with India had been somewhat haphazard. Thus, along with the use of the caravan trade routes, the Iranian-Armenian merchants made bold attempts to gain positions on the maritime trade routes.<sup>55</sup> Besides India, they began to send ships also to Muscat and the African and European countries. The Armenian merchants were equally interested in the wealth of the countries of the Persian Gulf basin and the commercial opportunities there. That region was rich in pearls, emeralds, rubies, sapphires and other precious stones. Among the exploiters of these resources through lease arrangements, were a large number of Iranian-Armenians.<sup>56</sup>

From the Persian Gulf basin, the Armenian merchants also exported spices, barley, furs, and other various locally made goods, to the Levant and Europe.

In the markets of the Gulf countries such as Basra, Qish, Hormuz, Muscat, etc, apart from Iranian and Arabian goods, products from Europe, Africa, and the Far Eastern countries were also sold. From Europe came various kind of goods, such as mirrors, lead, copper, iron and items made of these metals, as well as wool and cotton textiles. From India, Africa and China came silk, spices, ivory, black wood, nuts, cotton and precious stones.

The Armenian merchants were also actively engaged in the international exchange of gold and silver currency via the Persian Gulf basin. Francios Bernier describes these as trade routes for the circulation of international currency. A portion of the gold entering Europe from America came through Turkey, in exchange for locally produced merchandise. Another portion was sent to Iran in return for the Iranian silk, since Turkey needed the coffee imported from Yemen, while Yemen, Iran and Turkey needed Indian goods.

<sup>54</sup>W. Foster, *England's Quest* . . . , pp. 312-13.

<sup>55</sup>A. Sohab, *Tarikhi zendegani* . . . , p. 310.

<sup>56</sup>R. du Mans, *Estat de la Perse* . . . , pp. 187-89. Sanson, *Voyage ou Relation de l'etat* . . . , pp. 97, 86, V., p. 398.



Therefore, in lieu of these goods, they had to send a significant portion of the gold to India via the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.<sup>57</sup>

Subsequent to the opening of the Persian Gulf for the Iranian trade, the Isfahan-Mahyar-Yazd-Khas-Shiraz-Lar-Bandar Abbas caravan route through which the central regions of the country were connected with the Gulf, became a frequently used route. Isfahan and its Armenian suburb of New Julfa turned into bustling centers of the international trade. The relations of the Indian-Armenian merchants with the Iranian-Armenian khojas, after the establishment of New Julfa, expanded and gained momentum. This provided the New Julfa Armenian merchants the opportunity to exploit the sea routes along with the overland routes leading to India. The Armenian merchants travelled via the Caspian Sea in the direction of Khorasan, and from there by caravans to Kandahar, Kabul, and thereafter to Delhi.

However, the Armenians of New Julfa used the land trade routes leading to the commercial centers of the Levant more frequently. Their caravans departed from Isfahan for Tabriz, and from there they crossed to Aleppo, Bursa, Smyrna, etc.

Thus, the Armenian merchants constituted the link connecting the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean commercial centers to the Levantine trade centers.

Some of the major Iranian-Indian maritime commercial centers were: Bandar Abbas, Bandar Bushehr, Basra, and the Surat seaport, located on the Western shores of India, to which the commercial ships of the New Julfa merchants sailed regularly.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the khojas owned ocean liners such as *St. Mikayel*, *Kholuel*, etc.

There is also information available that among the important, wealthy khojas there were some who served as captains of their private ships. Some of them, for example, Hovhan and Hovsep Margarians, were among the major merchants in India.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Francis Bernier, *Istoriia poslednikh politicheskikh sobitii i perevorotov v gosudarstve Velikogo Mogola*, [History of the Latest Political Events and Coups in the State of the Great Moghul] (Moscow-Leningrad), 1936, pp. 183.

<sup>58</sup>W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar* . . . , pp. 221. M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present*, (Calcutta, 1937), pp. 290, 293.

In conducting their sea transport, the Armenian merchants often took advantage of Arabian as well as Dutch ships sailing between the Persian Gulf and India.<sup>60</sup>

The ships coming from India, often using coastal navigation, came to the Sea of Oman. Thereafter, through the Persian Gulf, approximately a distance of 2500 kilometers, they penetrated the interiors of continental Asia. From the point of origin of the river channel Shatt-al-Arab till the northern borders of Mesopotamia, goods were transported by the Euphrates River. The only overland part of the route from India to Europe, of about two hundred kilometers, was between the Euphrates and the Syrian coasts of the Mediterranean. The caravan routes were even further shortened when the goods were transported via the Vorontes River joining the Mediterranean.<sup>61</sup>

In order to protect themselves from pirates in the Indian Ocean, the ships were armed with canons. The ships sailing regularly between the Persian Gulf and India also transported cargo to the seaports of the Far East, Southeast Asia and the European countries. The commercial fleet of the Armenian merchants mainly consisted of small sailing vessels, which could move extremely fast and also had sufficient cargo capacity. Appreciating the advantages of such ships, the English East India Company governors decided to sell their large ships and use the ships of the Armenian merchants for the faster transport of goods to destinations.<sup>62</sup>

Having no state of their own, and deprived of a national flag, the Armenian ship owners created their own flag with red and yellow stripes and the picture of a lamb.<sup>63</sup>

The Armenian merchants' trade was not restricted to the Indian coastal towns. Through the Ganges River, they penetrated the interior of the country.<sup>64</sup> Arshak Alpopajean correctly notes: "The Europeans

<sup>60</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India* . . . , pp. 304-05, 321.

<sup>61</sup>K. Z. Ashrafian, *K voprosu* . . . , p. 152.

<sup>62</sup>N. N. Tumanovich, *Evropeiskie derzhave v Persidskom zalive v 16-19v.v.*, [European Powers in the Persian Gulf in the 16th - 19th Centuries] (Moscow, 1982), p. 31.

<sup>63</sup>J. Bruce, *Annals of the East India Company*, pp. 140-41.

<sup>64</sup>*Ewropa*, Vienna, 1858, p. 52.

<sup>65</sup>H. Ter-Dawt'ean Jughayets'u hashwetomare, p. 33.1

were only able to advance by following the footsteps of the Armenian merchants.<sup>65</sup>

The maritime commerce of the Armenian merchants of India was made difficult by the fact that, soon after the English, new competitors emerged, i.e., the Dutch, taking advantage of the weakening hold of the Portuguese over the ocean routes, appeared on the scene to gain the monopoly over the Eastern trade. The Dutch East India Company, established in 1602, attempted to penetrate the Persian Gulf and turn its islands into commercial checkpoints for trade between India and Europe. On November 21, 1623, the Dutch received the royal firman by which they gained rights and privileges equal to those of the English.<sup>66</sup> In short, it gave the right of free movement to the Dutch ships in the Persian Gulf.

The agreement was sealed despite fierce opposition from the English. By putting the Dutch against the English, the Shah wanted to limit the latter's influence in Iranian commerce. In 1626, a short-term (three year) commercial agreement was signed between the Dutch East India Company and the royal government which gave an unprecedented boost to the Iranian-Dutch trade (with an annual turnover of 40,000 tuman)<sup>67</sup> This agreement created some benefits for the khojas of New Julfa, who increased their trade with Holland. Many decided to settle permanently in Amsterdam to avoid trading through Dutch, Jewish and other intermediaries and be able to take full advantage of direct export and import of goods to and from the Dutch markets.<sup>68</sup>

The 1626 Iranian-Dutch agreement was followed by a new one signed in 1631 which specified a series of supplementary commercial rights to the Netherlanders. The latter, in 1638, also received the monopoly for importing spices into Iran. In 1642, the Dutch East India Company received from Shah Safi a new firman with complementary privileges. In reality, it was a capitulation agreement.

<sup>65</sup>A. Alpoijajan, *Patmut'wn hay gagh't'akanut'ean*, vol. III, p. 304.

<sup>66</sup>H. Dunlop, *Source pour servir a l'histoire . . .*, p. 74.

<sup>67</sup>N. Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution. . .*, p. 380.

<sup>68</sup>A. Sarukhan, *Holandian ew hayere . . .*, pp. 36-37.

It specified that the Iranian state employees did not have the right to interfere in the commercial activities of the Dutch, and that the Dutch nationals residing in Iran as well as the Persians, Armenians, Turks, Bengalese and others working for the Dutch were granted extraterritorial rights, i.e., they would not be subject to trials by the civil and religious courts of Iran. They were also given immunity and the freedom to practice their faith, etc.

Based on the above agreements, the Dutch were able to firmly establish themselves in the Iranian market. Soon they took absolute control of the entire trade being conducted in the Persian Gulf basin.

However, despite all these, neither the Dutch nor the English, were successful in ousting the Armenian merchants from their leading position in Iran's foreign trade. Only the maritime commerce of the Armenians was affected.

Tavernier writes, "Commerce in Persia was completely divided. The domestic commerce was run by the Christians and the Jews, and the foreign trade was completely in the hands of the Armenians."<sup>69</sup> This view is confirmed by the Frenchman, Gabriel de Chinon,<sup>70</sup> and the German Adam Olearius,<sup>71</sup> etc.

However, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch almost ceased to be competitors of the Armenian merchants in the Persian Gulf maritime commerce.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the English East India Company had become the richest and most powerful commercial organization. It had also become a political tool in the hands of the British government in its efforts to impose colonial rule in the East.

The English caused a major loss to the position obtained by Dutch in Iran. In the 1680s, the efforts of the Dutch East India Company to recover its lost position in Iran did not produce the desired results.<sup>72</sup>

Subsequent to its military and economic victories against the Dutch, Britain persistently tried to gain the monopoly over the Eastern trade.

<sup>69</sup>J. B. Tavernier, *Les six voyages . . .*, p. 510.

<sup>70</sup>G. de Chinon, *Relation nouvelle du Levant*, p. 225.

<sup>71</sup>*Podrobnoe opisanie puteshestviia . . .*, p. 791.

<sup>72</sup>Sanson, *Voyage ou Relation.*, pp.158-160.

An idea was conceived in London in order to realize this objective. It was decided that the Levantine trade had to be transferred to the sea routes under the control of Britain. This long-term plan was first directed at the commercial competitors of the English, the Dutch and the French.

One of the circumstances, that helped the activities of the Armenian merchants in India was the fact that during the reign of Shah Abbas I, trade within the boundaries of the Safavid kingdom was prohibited to Indian merchants since it could cause losses to the local khojas. Another reason for this prohibition was the fact that the Indian merchants were extensively involved in usury, an activity, which was in contradiction with the principles of the Islamic law, the shari'a and was a punishable offence.

After the opening of the Persian Gulf sea routes, as mentioned above, some of the New Julfa merchants exclusively specialized in the Indian trade, and opened trade houses in numerous Indian cities.

The khojas took their trade beyond the coastal towns of India. They went in the interiors of that vast country, and played a significant role in its domestic as well as foreign trade.

Their role in the foreign trade of India was noteworthy too. The Armenian merchants exported from India various local products, cotton and wool textiles, precious stones, spices and botanical dyes which were in great demand in Europe.

A large number of Armenians specialized in the cotton trade. They obtained raw material, had it spun, and woven, and finally exported the manufactured cloth.

The Indian trade was extremely profitable for the Armenian merchants. There are several testimonies in that regard. In 1666, the brothers Hovhan and Hovsep Margarians (known in the Western world by the names of John and Joseph Da-Mark or Demarkora) of New Julfa, jointly established a company in Milapor or San Tome with an initial capital of 27,500 rupees. Later, in 1697, when the company was dissolved due to the death of Hovhan, the final auditing of the

company books revealed that in a period of thirty years, it had gained a net profit of two million rupees.<sup>73</sup>

Academician L. S. Khachikian believes that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Armenian merchants conducting business in India made profits of over 100-120 per cent.

Among the Indian-Armenian merchants there were some whose assets were calculated to be in millions. One of them, for example, was Khoja Petros Ter Nikoghosian, who was a member of the Board of the East India Company in Madras. It is reported that when the governor of Karnataka visited Madras, Ter Nikoghosian ordered all the streets through which the nawab would pass to be covered in silk.<sup>74</sup> In the 1790s, after his death, Shahamir Shahamirian (another wealthy Armenian merchant in India) left fifty-two million francs to his heirs, in addition to various factories, tobacco plantations, and other real estate.<sup>75</sup>

In fact, there is information available that the Armenian merchants in India were also engaged in entrepreneurial activities. In this regard, the Frenchman Abba Reynal, writes: "Armenians came to India, purchased raw cotton, gave it to weavers. The textile was produced under their supervision. The final product textiles were sent to Isfahan via Bandar Abbas, from where they were supplied to all provinces of Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe where they were named Persian, although they were produced in the Coromandel Coast."

For their entrepreneurial activities, the Armenian merchants of medium capacity, borrowed money from major merchants at interest rates of 6-12 per cent.

The English East India Company, which in the first half of the seventeenth century was still far from obtaining monopoly rights in the East, including India, had to compromise with the local merchants of India, among them the Armenians.

Unfamiliar with the local languages, customs and traditions as well as the mode of conducting business, which was significantly

<sup>73</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India . . .*, pp. 304-305, 321.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 581-82.

<sup>75</sup>S. V. Ter-Avetisian, *Materiale po istorii . . .*, p. 11.



different from that of Europe, initially the English were obligated to conduct business through local intermediaries, by providing loans and funding their business ventures. The East India Company attempted to learn from the Armenian merchants not only about the commercial developments and overall situation in India, but also those of its neighboring countries. As was mentioned before, the company advised its employees to study the Persian and Armenian languages in order to become familiar with the business practices of the Armenian merchants.<sup>76</sup>

Through conducting business with the Iranian-Armenian merchants in India, the English tried to collect information about Iran's domestic and foreign trade. For example, in 1616, one of the executives of the company, Thomas Roy, commissioned his employees to gather useful information through the merchants in New Julfa about the Iranian commerce, its silk producing regions, and the seaports, which the English ships could enter, etc.<sup>77</sup>

The leaders of the English East India Company also used the services of the Armenians to establish good relations with local authorities. Thus, in 1651, the Company sent a delegation to Emperor Shah Jahan in order to obtain commercial rights in Bengal. The head of that delegation was an Armenian merchant named Agha Sarhad. As a result of the negotiations, the Emperor allowed the English to settle in Bengal where later the city of Calcutta was founded.<sup>78</sup>

However, all this did not bar the Armenian merchants from being the business competitors of the English East India Company. In fact, in the first phase of the establishment of English colonial rule in India, the Armenian merchants along with the Indian merchants and those of other nationalities were considered as rivals by the English in the Indian market. They significantly hindered the commercial activities of the English, and, therefore, the political penetration of the East India Company into India. As a result, as early as since the beginning of the

<sup>76</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India* . . . , p. 288.

<sup>77</sup>A. Taj Bakhsh, *Iran dar zaman Safaviye*, p. 198.

<sup>78</sup>Leo, *Haykakan t'pagrut'wn*, p. 514.

eighteenth century, the English began an active struggle against the Armenian merchants, with the aim of expelling them from the Indian market, or destroying their positions. For this purpose, the English resorted to all indiscriminate means. Thus, they tried to force the local rulers to restrict the rights and privileges given to the Armenian merchants. However, until Britain's political influence increased in India, these pressurizing methods did not produce results. Thus, the English preferred the oppressive measures of struggle.

To force their competitors, the Armenians, out of the Indian Ocean, the English resorted to various tactics, including confiscation of their ships, piracy as well as use of their military fleet and even their state apparatus.<sup>79</sup> The British used extensively the services of prominent sea pirates, John Barnaby and Samuel White, against the Armenian merchants.

We also know that during the war of the English East India Company against Siam ("Golconda War") on November 21, 1685, the English took over the ship *New Jerusalem* belonging to the influential New Julfa merchant, Hovhan Margarian in Madapolam, which was loaded with precious stones. The value of the ship with its cargo was estimated at five hundred sixty-five thousand pounds sterling.

Despite the efforts of the Madapolam authorities to pressurize the English East India Company on behalf of the Armenian merchants, the English government not only did not punish the pirate Cousts, but also granted him the title of Admiral. "Such an act corresponded with the principal maritime policy direction of the English," rightly states Hovhannes Barseghov, "that with all means at its disposal, among them by means of the pirates, to rid itself of its competitors over the seas, to sabotage their regular international trade, and to deprive them of their private sea transportation means."

Around this time, the English pirates confiscated Hovsep Margarian's first-rate commercial ship *Santa Cruz*. In response to the

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<sup>79</sup>P. Gosse, *The Pirates*, (London, 1877), p. 35.

English policy, the Armenian merchants approached the competitor of the English in India and their political rival, France. In the second half of the seventeenth century, in India, like in other parts of the world, a sharp struggle began between Britain and France. In 1667, the French East India Company established its first factory in the city of Surat.<sup>80</sup> In the same year at the initiative of Colbert, a small fleet was sent from Madagascar to India, headed by François Caron who was famous in the East. One of the important officials in his delegation was an Armenian, Margar Avanchents (Marcara Avanchinz) who was assigned broad responsibilities. The French East India Company, on behalf of the French commercial interests, had great expectations of this merchant. In fact, shortly after, Avanchents obtained a royal decree from King Abdullah Qutub of Golconda, who permitted the French East India Company to conduct tax-free business in all the territories under his rule. This was a valuable privilege, which the English had been able to obtain at a great expense, but not the Dutch. Thereafter, Avanchents moved to Masulipatam and from there, to the Coromandel Coast, where he established a French factoria, and as its director in that part of India (he also became one of the directors of the French East India Company), took charge of the French trade.<sup>81</sup>

Realizing that cooperation with the Armenian merchants was strengthening the position of the French East India Company, the English decided to mitigate their oppressive policy against the Armenian merchants, and, on the contrary, use the tactic of luring them to their side as a long-term policy initiative. The gradual strengthening of the English position in India also required that they review the attitude adopted by the East India Company towards the Armenian merchants. There were other factors too. As a result of the three Anglo-Dutch wars between 1652-1674, the military power of the Dutch had been shattered, followed by decline of its commercial might.<sup>82</sup> England emerged as a powerful colonial power,

<sup>80</sup>S. Ter M. Grigorean, *Hayk' i haravayin Hndkastan [Armenians in South India]*, (Venice, 1922), pp. 31-32.

<sup>81</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India . . .*, pp. 318-20. N. Marr, *Nadgrobniy kamen iz Semirechiya [Tombstone from Semirechiy]*, (Frunze, 1949), p.31-32.

<sup>82</sup>*Vsemirnaia istoriia*, t. 5, (Moscow, 1958), pp. 97-98.

replacing the Dutch in the areas of manufacturing of products and commerce.

The English trade companies (Muscovy Company, Marroccan Company, Ostend Company, and a few others) functioned in vast territories extending from Iran to North America, and from Sweden to India and Ceylon.

The oceanic route leading to India also came under the control of the English, leading to certain adjustments in Great Britain's maritime policy. Having dreamed of gaining a monopoly over the Eastern trade, Britain now wished to shift to the oceanic routes under its control. Another reason for this was that the position of the English in the Levant was weaker than that of its competitors, the French and the Dutch.

Many documents testify to the fact that the English clearly understood that the realization of such a plan depended on whether they could attract the Iranian-Armenian merchants, and thus, divert their Asia Minor trade from the land and Volga-Caspian routes, towards the oceanic routes. The English were aware of the fact that the foreign trade of raw silk was in the hands of the Armenian merchants, who, following the example of the Western countries, had merged their capital and created powerful trade companies, signing contracts with the leading European powers. What also infuriated the government circles in London was the fact that the Armenian merchants conducted their trade mainly relying on their own private capital, without requiring any loans.<sup>83</sup> Finally, what enraged the English was the positive reputation that the Armenian merchants enjoyed in the international markets.

Furthermore, it is necessary to note that in the 1680s, the position of the English had become complicated in India. Emperor Aurangzeb had ascended to the Moghul throne, and to prevent the weakening of the empire, he was trying to control the feudal lords with an iron fist as he attempted to unify and simultaneously expand the Moghul territory. Aurangzeb had begun to oppose the growing influence of

<sup>83</sup>Bruce, *Annales of the Honorable . . .*, pp. 140-41.

the English. In 1686, by the order of Emperor Aurangzeb, the English in Bengal were subjected to persecution, resulting in the curtailment of their trade activities there. The English tried to resist with arms. In response, the Moghuls send an army, which crushed and expelled them from Bengal. In the meantime, all the English factorias and trade houses were looted on both the Eastern and Western coasts. The English had no option but to submit to the emperor and express allegiance. Only, thus, were the English able to remain in India. All this is evidence that the English were in dire need of the assistance of the Armenian merchants.<sup>84</sup>

These developments resulted in a drastic change in the position of the Armenian merchant bourgeoisie towards the English East India Company. From an adversarial one, the relationship shifted towards trade-economic cooperation.

Since it was difficult to involve the entire Iranian-Armenian khoja class in their plans, the English decided, as a first step, to attract a portion of the New Julfa merchants dealing with the Indian market.

On June 22, 1688, in the city of Surat, an agreement was signed between the English East India Company and the New Julfa Armenian merchants doing business in India.<sup>85</sup>

On behalf of the English East India Company, its presidents, Benjamin Bathurst and Sir Josia Child, as well as the senior officials of their highest executive council, and on behalf of the Armenian merchants, their representative, Khoja Panos Kalantar, signed the agreement. As a sign of gratitude, the company granted the monopoly of trade in precious stones to Khoja Panos Kalantar. The letter of grace published on the occasion reads that hence the company will not engage in the purchase and sale of the mentioned goods, furthermore, it will not allow others to engage in that business as well, be they English or any foreign nationals.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Leo, *Haykakan tpagrut'iwn*, p. 516.

<sup>85</sup>See "Azgaser", vol. 2, no. 37, 38, 39, Calcutta, 1846. M.J. Seth, *Armenians in India..*, pp.48-50.

<sup>86</sup>"Azgaser", vol. 2, no. 38, p. 140.



In the charter, published as an attachment to the agreement, the East India Company granted extremely broad rights and privileges to the Armenian merchants. First, they received rights equal to those of the British citizens, among them the right to hold civilian positions. They were also entitled to all the privileges available to the European merchants.

The Armenians were given the right to reside in any city, town, and fort which fell under the jurisdiction of the English East India Company. Also, they were allowed to own lands, houses, commercial and real estate, enjoy complete freedom of faith and conscience, be elected to political positions, etc. The taxes and duties were set at limits equal to those of the English. It was also mentioned in the agreement that any company official, including the governor, who violated the provisions of the articles of the agreement and denied the rights and privileges given to Armenians, would be punished and relieved of his duties.

The English East India Company took upon itself the responsibility of dismissing those governors in India, who disrupted or did not comply with agreements of the company with the Armenian merchants.

The East India Company guaranteed freedom of conscience to the "apostolic Armenians", and expressed its readiness to assign land from its land holdings for the construction of an Armenian church. The company was also prepared to build Armenian churches with its own resources in all the places where more than forty Armenians lived.<sup>87</sup>

The company was also obligated to build, at its own expense, wooden churches for the Armenians, and allow them, if they wished, to replace these with stone structures in the future.

The agreement specifically mentioned all the goods, which the Armenian merchants could trade in. They included: silver, precious stones, dyes, mercury, arms, processed and non processed iron, paper, books, coffee, mirrors, porcelain, chinaware, various Nuremberg ware, furs, Venetian china, woolen textiles, lead, beverages, various

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 140. H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China*, (Oxford, 1926), vol. I, p. 174.



Chinese and Bengali export goods, various kinds of Iranian raw silk, Kerman wool, etc.<sup>88</sup> The custom duties to be collected for the above mentioned goods, and their transport by the English East India Company ships were specified in detail. The maximum custom duty was set at ten per cent.

The last article of the agreement was the most important one for the English. It said the following: "... Previously, Armenians exported a principle portion of the Indian goods through the overland routes from Iran and Arabia to Turkey. Henceforth, they commit themselves to export all their goods through the English routes..."<sup>89</sup> (that is, the sea routes circling Africa). Thus, the Armenian merchants were obligated to export their goods exclusively by English ships, and never to use the Dutch and Arabian ships.

There can be no doubt that the Armenian merchants were equally interested in the signing of the 1688 agreement for which they clearly manifested great enthusiasm. The agreement, henceforth, provided them the protection of the British authorities, and also allowed them to utilize the seaports and storage depots belonging to the English, and to transport their goods by the English ships, thereby insuring them against piracy. Finally, the Armenian merchants received the unhindered right to establish direct trade relations with England.

It is not difficult to note that the 1688 agreement was formed in compliance with, and in the spirit of, the 1651 "Navigation Act" and was directed against the powerful Dutch commercial might as well as against England's trade adversary and competitor, France. In that regard, the Frenchman, Raphael du Mans, writes, that if the Iranian commerce was to be shifted totally towards the Indian Ocean, and the Iranian goods were to be sent to Europe via the oceanic routes, Marseilles could lose its significance.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, for Louis XIV, it was very important that the Armenian khojas "conducted their trade through the former route, that is via France."<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup>"Azgaser", vol. 2, no. 37, pp.132-33.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>R. du Mans, *Estat de la Perse*, p. 361.

<sup>91</sup>Leo, *Khojayakan kapital*, p. 106.

Here, it needs to be mentioned that maritime trade with India had significantly hurt the merchants, among them the Armenian merchants of New Julfa who transported their goods to the Mediterranean ports through the land routes. The impact of the domestic conflicts in Iran, and the various military campaigns equally hurt trade conducted through the land routes due to the insecurity that threatened the caravan routes. The Armenians merchants gradually despaired, deprived of the use of the land routes, and began to pursue the maritime routes.

As far as Holland was concerned, it occupied an important position in the area of maritime and oceanic commercial routes. Thus, it constituted a serious obstacle for Britain in the latter's quest for monopoly over maritime commerce, and oceanic routes in general.

The Dutch as well as the Portuguese, as a rule, had settled in the coastal areas of India and maintained a friendly trade relationship with the Armenian merchants. In 1636, the Dutch established their first trading posts in Bengal, in Chinsurah and Chichra. Here, we come across the name of the wealthy and famous Margar family whose most prominent member was Khoja Hovhannes Margar of Julfa, known as the Gharib, who after his death, was buried (1697) in the Armenian churchyard in Chinsurah.

The expansive trade relations of the Armenians with the Dutch allowed the former free access to all places under the Dutch rule: Malacca, Sumatra, Java, the Indian Ocean Islands, etc.

The 1688 agreement was extremely beneficial to the English East India Company. It is no accident that until the end of the seventeenth century, the English continued their policy of appeasement towards Armenian merchants. In 1691, the London headquarters of the East India Company ordered its representatives in India to "attract those experienced Armenian merchants, who have immensely contributed to the development of trade in India, Iran, and the entire Asia by providing them with a special neighborhood in Madras, where they could live as they wished and construct a church. The neighborhood could be called Julfa, following the example of Shah Abbas, who

migrated them to Isfahan. Those Armenians are wealthy people and constitute one of the most experienced merchants on the earth."<sup>92</sup>

On September 13, 1695, the communique issued by the English East India Company Board of Directors, mentioned that the company had sustained huge losses only due to the fact that its officials had tried to establish commercial ties in Multan and Sind without involving the Armenian merchants.<sup>93</sup>

In the seventeenth century, the English attempted to utilize not only the commercial talent of the Armenians, but also hoped to take advantage of their services for their colonizing objectives. In this regard, the following evidence is of significance. In 1661, the special charter of the British government had permitted the East India Company to form an army.<sup>94</sup> The company tried to conscript its armed forces mainly from the migrant elements, so that in case of local revolts they would have the guarantee of their support. In 1692, the executives of the East India Company appealed to Khoja Panos Kalantar, asking him to organize the recruitment of Armenians residing in India and Iran in the army, promising to compensate them generously and grant them English citizenship.<sup>95</sup> However, that suggestion was not received positively by the Armenian circles, and the English initiative met with complete failure. Documents show that despite the efforts of the English, they did not succeed in diverting the Armenian trade completely towards the oceanic routes. The Armenians did not want to totally give up the Levantine and Mediterranean trade routes, which for the entire period of the seventeenth century remained the most important intercontinental routes and junctions.

From the mid-eighteenth century, when the economic, commercial, and political dominance of the English in India was finally established,

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<sup>92</sup>Bruce, *Annals of the Honorable . . .*, p. 617.

<sup>93</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India . . .*, p. 242.

<sup>94</sup>K. N. Tatarinova, *Ocherki po istorii Anglii [Sketches of the History of England]*, (Moscow, 1958), p. 205.

<sup>95</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India . . .*, pp. 31, 51-53.

the behavior of the East India Company towards the Armenian merchants changed drastically. The English were now no longer willing to share the large profits gained from the colonial trade with the Armenians.

Thus, the Armenian merchants, no matter how well established and strong their positions were in the Indian markets, could no longer continue as independently functioning entities. Deprived of state support, with outdated document processing methods, and in light of the advancing, highly organized European capital and its powerful growth prospects, the Armenians could only resort to their personal means and initiatives.

Besides that, the Armenian merchants were dispersed around India, working independently of each other. Under the best of circumstances they cooperated only through small associations, which limited their potential for competition. Furthermore, they were not in a position to resist the English competition, because with the passage of time their business methods had not developed. During the eighteenth century they continued to do business according to the traditional, patrimonial methods. Hence, the Armenian merchants were unable to utilize the banking capital, unlike the European merchants. And finally, the huge English East India Company benefited from the assistance of the army and the powerful state apparatus and support mechanisms. As a result of the trade monopolies created by them, as well as the realization of various methods of the colonial economic policy (e.g., arbitrariness, fines, pressures, brutalities), the Armenian trade in India headed for decline. Many *khojas* were ruined, became bankrupt and ceased to function.<sup>96</sup>

The English even resorted to bribing the local governors and feudal lords to suppress the Armenian merchants. As a result of all this, many Armenian merchants emigrated from Lahor. The flourishing Armenian communities in numerous Indian cities also began to decline. A mass emigration of Armenians ensued from that country of legendary wealth towards other countries.

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<sup>96</sup>K. Z. Ashrafian, *K voprosu . . .*, p. 153.

At the same time, due to almost the same reasons, the attitude of the French authorities towards the Indian-Armenian merchants had also taken a negative turn. In 1746, the French conquered Madras. They plundered and razed to the ground over forty houses (excluding those located in the fortress) belonging to Khoja Petros Ter Nikoghosian, and properties and treasures were confiscated and sent to Pondicherry.<sup>97</sup> The mass expulsion of Armenian merchants from the Asian markets, forced them to search for new markets. In order to resist the Europeans, the Armenians made an attempt to assemble and become more organized. However, this time, there was a resolute aspiration on the part of the representatives of the Armenian merchants to access and own markets in their fatherland. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the trade bourgeoisie became a leading force in the Armenian liberation movement, aspiring to create in their ancestral land a political regime that would be capable of supporting their interests.<sup>98</sup>

Shahamir Shahamirian was the first in the Indian-Armenian community to initiate and preach the doctrine of political freedom and political revivalism. He called on Armenians dispersed throughout the world to return from emigration, to leave their adopted countries, return "home" and regain what was rightfully theirs.<sup>99</sup>

Seventeenth century India was a fulcrum over which the Armenian merchants conducted business with China, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Far East countries, the Pacific and Indian Ocean islands, etc. They had vibrant commercial ties with Burma, Siam, Tibet (in some Armenian and European sources, Bhutan is also mentioned), Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Malaysian archipelago, and numerous other countries.

In the above-mentioned places, the Armenian merchants maintained close contact with the major Armenian trade houses in India and conducted business with them. Many of them were the

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<sup>97</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India* . . . , p. 582.

<sup>98</sup>K. Z. Ashrafian, *K voprosu* . . . , p. 155.

<sup>99</sup>Leo, *Haykakan t'pagrut'wn*, p. 526.

employees and officials of their branch offices, with broad fields of operations.

The historical contacts of the Chinese with the Armenians have not been the subject of extensive research yet. There is a reliable scholarly view that the Chinese were familiar with the Armenian merchants since the ancient times. The Armenians visited China as early as the early Middle Ages, during the reign of the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907).<sup>100</sup> Later, the contacts become even more intense and frequent. Andreas of Perugia, a member of the Franciscan Order, in a letter written from China in 1326, says that in the city, located in the Taiwan strait's Gulf of Tsiuanju, "a very wealthy Armenian woman has constructed a big and beautiful church, which by the order of Archbishop Giovanni Monte Corvino has been converted into a Catholic cathedral." This proves that in the early fourteenth century, Armenians were frequent visitors, in the coastal cities of southwest China, which made the construction of a church indispensable.<sup>101</sup>

According to the Jesuit clerics, in the sixteenth century the Armenians were the pioneers of commerce and Christianity in China.<sup>102</sup> It is mentioned that in 1603, Jesuit missionaries, for their protection, entered China using Armenian names and clothes.<sup>103</sup>

As a rule, the Armenian merchants entered China through the maritime routes. However, economic contacts with China had also been established through the caravan routes which crossed Central Asia and Kashgar, leading to China.<sup>104</sup> The tombstone with Armenian and Assyrian inscriptions in the Christian cemetery, in the village of Bishbeg, located in the Semirechieh region of the

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<sup>100</sup>Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean *Jughayets'u hashvetomare* . . . , pp. 27-28. See also J.E. Hall, *Istoriya Yugo-Vostochnoy Asii* [History of South-East Asia], (Moscow, 1958)

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>102</sup>A. Alpayajan, *Patmut'ivn hay gagh't'akanut'ean*, vol. III, p. 292.

<sup>103</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 467.

<sup>104</sup>Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean *Jughayets'u hashvetomare* . . . , p. 29.



Balkash Lake basin is an evidence of such contacts. It reads: "Records wrote by Father Hovhan Bishop of Armenians in the Armenian year of ECHIB (1323)."<sup>105</sup>

According to article four of the agreement signed between the English East India Company and Indian-Armenian merchant, Khoja Panos Kalantar in 1688, the Armenians were permitted to engage in trade with China upon payments of custom duties equal to those paid by the English.<sup>106</sup>

The Armenian merchants also conducted trade with China through Tibet. Hovhannes Ter Davtian Jughayets'i in his *Hashvetumar* (The Account Book) writes that a group of Armenian merchants including Tsatur, Melijan, Nikoghos and Davit, overcoming numerous obstacles, traveling through the most difficult mountain passes and uninhabited terrain, headed from Tibet to the commercial city of Cinin in China, and from there delivered to Lhasa large quantities of smelted gold, furs, tea, "Slnki chal" and other goods.<sup>107</sup> Some evidence allows us to assume that a few Armenian merchants established residence in the city of Cinin (Xining).<sup>108</sup>

There is rich evidence about the Armenian expeditions to Central Asia and China, and the Armenian-Chinese ties in French author P. Demieville's book.<sup>109</sup>

According to Nikoghayos Spatarus Milescu, who was the head of the Russian delegation dispatched to China between 1675-1678, knowledge of silk production, forging canons, and the use of the compass in navigation, and other innovations, gained from the Chinese

<sup>105</sup>N.Y. Marr, *Nadgrobniy kamen iz Semirechiya s armyansko-siriyskoj nadpisyu* 1373 g. [Tombstone from Semirechiye with Armenian-Syrian Inscription of 1373], ZVOAO, vol. 8 pp.344-49. V.V. Bartold, *Ocherk istorii Semirechiya* [Sketch of History of Semirechiya], (Frunze, 1949), p.45 L. Khachikian, *Hayots patmagrutyan anhayt ejerits* [From Unknown Pages of Armenian Historiography], *Patma-Banasirakan Handes*, 1972, no. 4, pp.243-44

<sup>106</sup>M. J. Seth, *Armenians in India* . . . , p. 271.

<sup>107</sup>Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean Jughayets'u *hashvetomare* . . . , pp. 26-27.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup>Les Arméniens en Chine et en Asie Central au Moyen Age," (*Mélanges de sinologie offerts à M. Paul Demieville*), t. II, (Paris, 1974), pp. 1-17.

was disseminated in Europe by Father Odorikos (of Pordinon), Anthon, the Armenian, and Marco Polo.<sup>110</sup>

There is information available about Anthon the Armenian—he had been a captain and had served the Republic of Venice. His will and last testament, written in the late fourteenth century has been preserved.

The trade conducted by the Armenian merchants with Burma was also extensive. Kostand Jughayets'i mentions two cities in that country, Ava and Rangoon, where the Armenian merchants were established. According to English sources, Armenian trading houses and commercial offices, which were serious competitors of the Europeans, were present in Burma and its neighboring countries.<sup>111</sup>

Testifying in this regard, a traveler, who had visited Burma in the seventeenth century, wrote: "The Armenians, established in Ava, had their own autonomous rule, and had made the business affairs of the European merchants considerably difficult."<sup>112</sup>

Regarding the Armenian communities in the early seventeenth century Burma, important information is provided by H. G. Agonts.<sup>113</sup> From the information available, it is apparent that the Armenians in Burma enjoyed considerable authority and influence. Thus, the executive of the English trade house in Madras, during his negotiations with the Burmese officials in 1692, had appealed for the mediation of the Armenians in Burma.<sup>114</sup> The English traveler, S. Master, during his visit to Burma in 1675-1680, in a report sent to London, wrote, "The Armenians of Pegu . . . have the entire trade of ruby in Burma in their hands."<sup>115</sup> However, the Armenians were not engaged solely in the trade of precious stones.

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<sup>110</sup>N. Spafariy, *Opisanie perviya chasti vseleeniia, imenuemoi Asii, v nei zhe sostoit kitayskoe gosudarstvo s prochimi ego gorode i provintsii* [Description of the First Part of Universe, Called Asia, Part of which is the Chinese State with its towns and Provinces], (Kazan, 1910), pp. 24-25. Gh. Alishan, *Hay-Venet.*, pp. 171-173.

<sup>111</sup>J. E. Hall, *Istoriya Yugo-Vostochnoy Azii*, p. 264.

<sup>112</sup>M. Gasparean, "Birmayi hay gaghut'e," [Armenian Community of Burma], *Nor Azdarar, Haykaran*, no. 1, 1950, p. 15.

<sup>113</sup>H. G. Agonts', *Ashkharhagrut'iwn chorits' masants' ashkhathi* [Geography of the Four Parts of the World], part I, vol. IV, (Venice, 1805), p. 152.

<sup>114</sup>Sion, Jerusalem, 1959, p. 158.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169.

The Armenian communities in Burma consisted mainly of the Armenians of Old and New Julfa, who had either come directly from their ancestral land or from the Indian-Armenian communities of Madras, Dacca and especially Bengal, bordering Burma.<sup>116</sup>

In the 1750s, the Armenian communities of Burma enjoyed a period of growth thanks to the arrival of fresh wave of immigrants from New Julfa. When the English began the persecution of Armenians in India, a significant portion of the Armenian merchants moved to Burma, which at that time had not been yet colonized by the English.

As mentioned earlier, we find interesting information in Hashvetumar of Hovhanness, son of the New Julfa merchant Ter Davit, regarding the trade of the Armenian merchants in Tibet, one of the countries in the East that for many centuries (until 1904) had been closed to the outside world. Therefore, little information, regarding the economic history of the country during the Middle Ages has been preserved. The Tibetan records of Hovhannes Jughayetsi's Hashvetumar contain valuable information, which is reliable, and substantial. It occupies a special place among the topographies provided by foreign visitors to that country. Hovhannes Jughayets'i is considered to be the fourth visitor to Tibet who has left a written account about the region.<sup>117</sup> He visited Tibet in 1686 on a business assignment. Before him, the French missionaries Odorikos of Friula or Pordenont (fourteenth century), the Portuguese, Antonio of Andradar (1624), and the Austrian, Jesuit Johan Gruber (1660s) were among the early visitors to Tibet.<sup>118</sup>

However, there is reliable information available to indicate that even before Hovhannes Jughayets'i, other Armenian merchants had visited that country. One of them perhaps was Kostand Jughayets'i who in his *Ashkharhazhoghov* provides information regarding the measuring units that were used in Tibet (Butand).<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup>A. G. Abrahamean, *Hamarot urwagits hay gagh'avayrer* . . . , vol. II, p. 284.

<sup>117</sup>See Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean Jughayets'u hashvetomare . . . ,

<sup>118</sup>See preface of Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean Jughayets'u hashvetomare . . . ,

<sup>119</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. no. 10704, p. 36a.

Hovhannes Ter Davtian Jughayests'i in his Hashvetumar, testifies that when he arrived in Lhasa in 1686, along with a large number of Tibetans, Nepalese, Kashmiris and other merchants, he met Armenian khojas there. He even lists their names: Tsatur, son of Ghukas, Melizan, son of Poghos, Abraham, son of Karapet of Gazk, Matos of Melijanents, Nekghos (Nikoghos), son of Martiros, Hakob, Khumts'i Agha, Davit, Murad, Hovhan, son of Sargis, Aknts'i Aslan, Petros, etc.<sup>120</sup>

Hovhannes Jughayets'i stayed in Tibet for five years. Mastering the Tibetan language, he became familiar with the customs and traditions of the people of that country. His Hashvetumar is an invaluable primary source which provides information about the amount of the taxes collected from the goods exported and imported to and from Iran, India, Nepal and Tibet, the mode of transportation of merchandise, as well as information on miscellaneous issues.

As mentioned above, the Armenian merchants conducted a considerable volume of trade also with Indonesia. According to some sources, the Armenian community of Dutch India was founded in 1656, by a merchant named Khoja Solima, who resided in the city of Magasar. Thus, one may conclude that in Java, as well as other Indonesian islands, there were Armenian merchants. On March 31, 1747, the Dutch East India Company issued a communique by which Armenians were granted the right of "Free Citizenship",<sup>121</sup> by which they enjoyed rights equal to those of the Europeans.<sup>122</sup>

According to information available to us, it becomes clear that the number of Armenians, who had amassed wealth in Dutch India, was as significant as the number in British India. One of them, for example, was the merchant Harutiu Zakaria, who lived and worked in Batavia.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup>Hovhannes Ter-Dawt'ean Jughayets'u hashvetomare . . . , p. 26.

<sup>121</sup>G. Paulus, *Short History of the Armenian Community in Netherlands India (Calcutta)*, p. 5.

<sup>122</sup>Hord. Ter-Hordananean, *Netrlandakan Arewelean Hndkastanay hay gaghut'i patmut'iwne skzben minch' mer orere*, [History of the Armenian Colony in the Dutch East India from the Beginning till Nowadays] (Jerusalem, 1937), p. 15.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

Kostand Jughayets'i mentions, along with the Far Eastern islands of Malacca, Timor, Macao, and Indonesian islands, the name of the capital of the Philippines, Manila, as a commercial city where there were Armenian merchants.<sup>124</sup>

A majority of the Armenians merchants who went to the Philippines for the purpose of trade were originally from New Julfa, having settled in India, China, and other Eastern countries. Agonts writes regarding the early immigrants of Manila: "No other nation or any European could conduct business there with the exception of the Chinese, Indians, and Armenians". Ghevond Alishan writes: "Many of the representatives of other nations conducted business in the name of the Armenians."<sup>125</sup>

The small Armenian community of Manila in this period was considered a unique supporting base, a bridge linking the Armenian communities of the Far East, the Armenian communities of China and India, and New Julfa.<sup>126</sup>

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, major social and political developments in the Asian countries left a negative impact on the fate of the Armenian communities, as a result of which Armenian commerce also declined, closing one of the glorious chapters of the history of the Armenian khojas.

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<sup>124</sup>M. Mashtots'i *anwan Matenadaran*, dzer. No. 5684, t'. 2b.

<sup>125</sup>Gh. Alishan, *Sisakan*, p. 468.

<sup>126</sup>A. G. Abrahamian, *Hamarot urwagits hay gaght'avayreri . . .*, vol. II, p. 323.

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The name of meritorious professor of Iranian Dr. Vahan Baibourtian, is well-known in the scholarly circle and among those who deal with the history of the Armenian trade and the role of the Armenians, in particular, the Armenian-Iranian merchants in international trade.

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