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## ECONOMIC RELATIONS

OF THE SAFAVID STATE OF AZERBAIJAN WITH ENGLAND AT THE SECOND HALF OF THE 16TH CENTURY - BEGINNING OF THE 17TH CENTURY

### RELACIONES ECONÓMICAS DEL ESTADO SAFÁVIDA DE AZERBAIYÁN CON INGLATERRA EN LA SEGUNDA MITAD DEL SIGLO XVI - PRINCIPIOS DEL SIGLO XVII

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#### ABSTRACT

The article reflects the economic relations between the Safavid state of Azerbaijan and England in the second half of the 16th century - beginning of the 17th century. It provides detailed information on the visits of British merchants to Azerbaijan, and the trade privileges they received from the state for the export of silk. At that time, English merchants were not only exempted from customs duties, but also guaranteed the patronage of local rulers. The main type of British exports to the East was broadcloth due to the comercial advantages, it was possible to sell a bolt of broadcloth for 150-160 shahis in the cities of the Safavid state. In addition, markets in the cities of the Safavid state were more in demand for densely woven fabrics, black and other colored fabrics, crimson silk velvet, satin and red woolen fabrics than products produced in Western Europe. All of this was possible because the ruler of the Safavid state gave a state order to British merchants to meet his country's needs for European goods.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan-England trade, diplomatic missions, silk trade

#### RESUMEN

El artículo refleja las relaciones económicas entre el estado Safavid de Azerbaiyán e Inglaterra en la segunda mitad del siglo XVI - principios del siglo XVII. Proporciona información detallada sobre las visitas de comerciantes británicos a Azerbaiyán y los privilegios comerciales que recibieron del estado para la exportación de seda. En ese momento, los comerciantes ingleses no solo estaban exentos de los derechos de aduana, sino que también garantizaban el patrocinio de los gobernantes locales. El principal tipo de exportaciones británicas al este fue la tela ancha debido a las ventajas comerciales, era posible vender un rollo de tela ancha por 150-160 shahis en las ciudades del estado de Safavid. Además, los mercados en las ciudades del estado de Safavid tenían más demanda de telas densamente tejidas, telas negras y de otros colores, terciopelo de seda carmesí, satén y telas de lana roja que los productos producidos en Europa Occidental. Todo esto fue posible porque el gobernante del estado Safavid dio una orden estatal a los comerciantes británicos para satisfacer las necesidades de bienes europeos de su país.

**Palabras clave:** Comercio Azerbaiyán-Inglaterra, misiones diplomáticas, comercio de seda

## INTRODUCTION

The period of the Safavids, the dynasty that took control of Persia in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, is often considered the beginning of modern Persian history, just as the state they created is said to mark the genesis of the Persian nation-state. It would be anachronistic to call Safavid Persia a modern nation-state, and it is important to realize that, in many ways, Safavid society continued Mongol and Timurid patterns and practices—ranging from its coinage to its administrative institutions. The Safavids, in fact, consciously built their legitimacy on past tradition (Matthee, 2020).

According to Matthee (2021, pp. 16–17) the exact date of the establishment of the Safaviyya order and the circumstances surrounding its foundation are difficult to pinpoint due to the scarcity of written material from this period and the distorted border between the historical facts and the pietistic legends of later pro- and anti-Safavid ideologists. With the exception of *Safvat al-Safā*, written by Ebn Bazzāz (1391/2), a devout follower of the order, around 1356/7, there are no surviving sources composed by either the sheykhs or the followers of the order.

However, it is known that at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Azerbaijan became the power base of the native dynasty, the Safavids. Through a vigorous policy of expansion and consolidation they built a new Iranian Kingdom. Shah Ismail I (1501-1524) known also as a poet under the pen name Khatai, elevated the Shi'a branch of Islam to the status of the state religion of his empire, an act that reinforced its internal cohesion and set the Azeris firmly apart from the ethnically and linguistically close Ottoman Turks (Świętochowski & Collins, 1999).

Tensions in Safavid-Ottoman relations continued with the death of Shah Ismail I and the transfer of power to his young son Tahmasp. During the reign of Tahmasp I, traditional Azerbaijani-European relations continued. Of course, in the development of these relations two factors played a key role. The first factor was the “Ottoman threat” and the second one was trade. The British government was constantly trying to gain a trade advantage in the East, and for this began an active foreign policy, under these circumstances. It should be noted that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as the roads through the Indian Ocean were controlled by Portugal and Spain, and the roads through the Mediterranean and the Black Sea were under the control of the Ottoman state, Britain, the Netherlands and other Western countries were looking for ways to reach the East, primarily India and the Safavids.

In 1553, the English merchant Richard Chansellor negotiated with Tsar Ivan the Terrible in Moscow, and was able

to obtain special privileges for English merchants in the field of trade. A decree signed by Ivan the Terrible gave British merchants the right to trade freely with Russia. After that, in 1555, a trading company called, “The Muscovy Company” was established to develop trade relations between the two countries (Yampolsky, 1961, p. 497).

This transcendental event gave way to a development of trade thus raising the status of importance of Azerbaijan. The advancement of the Russian trade with the countries of the East led to an increase in goods production, volume, and expansion of the variety of imported and exported goods. Russian merchants could acquire raw materials and products from the East more conveniently and cheaply, and the export of their own goods became easier. Trade conducted through Shirvān and the territory of Muscovite Rus' had international significance as a large amount of goods of eastern and western production was transported through these countries both ways along the Europe — Muscovy — Caucasus — East route. The region's strategic geographical location therefore significantly contributed to strengthening of mutual contacts of Russian commercial environment with the East and Safavid Persia (Rybar, 2020).

Contact with European culture accelerated education (Abdullayeva & Gasimova, 2021), the creation of new jobs as well as the specialization of skill workers, as well as the access to products that enabled higher comfort and eventually a better welfare system. Then, given the relevance that this process had, the objective of this work is to comment some important points about the influence of the economic relations of the Safavid state of Azerbaijan with England at the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century - beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century from an historical point of view.

## DEVELOPMENT

After the establishment of The Muscovy Company, 6 trade delegations were sent to the Safavid state in 1561-1581 (Tumanovich, 1982, p. 188). This fact in itself proves that Britain attached great importance to establishing trade relations with Azerbaijan, the main silk-growing region of the East. Azerbaijan was intended as a mainstay in Britain's plans for the East. Strengthening their position here, the British thought to find new trading and cheap sources of raw materials in the East (Ahmedov, 1966, p. 90).

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1561, Queen Elizabeth I of England sent a letter to the Safavid court through Anthony Jenkinson. The letter, written by the Queen of England to Tahmasp I, spoke of the establishment and development of friendly

relations between the two countries (Minorsky, 1940, p. 458), (Brentjes, 2010).

During a meeting with Abdulla Khan Ustajli, Beylerbey of Shirvan, Anthony Jenkinson told him that the main purpose of his visit to Safavid countries was to establish friendly relations between the two countries, ask the Shah to give permission for selling English goods freely in his country, the right to buy and carry all kinds of goods here, and the privilege of immunity for English merchants. The company's representative also had to get permission from the Shah for English merchants to freely cross the territory of Azerbaijan to India and return to Russia.

It is interesting that, during talks with Abdulla Khan in Shamakhi, Anthony Jenkinson also explained why Britain did not want to use traditional Ottoman caravans and waterways to obtain Safavid silk. Anthony Jenkinson said that as the Ottoman state tightened its control over the ancient trade routes from the Mediterranean to Western Europe, British merchants could no longer use this way freely. On the other hand, British merchants were dissatisfied with the fact that they bought Safavid raw silk and other Oriental goods from Venetian merchants who traded freely with the Ottoman state. For these reasons, in the 1560s, the British tried to gain free access to the Middle and Far East via the Volga-Caspian road.

Anthony Jenkinson, who came to Qazvin to meet with Tahmasp I, had high hopes that he would receive special privileges from the Safavid state for British merchants and would be able to influence the shah and provoke a war with the Ottoman state. However, according to the Peace of Amasya in 1555, normal political and economic relations were established between the Safavid and Ottoman states. There was a lively trade between the Ottomans and the Safavids through the caravan route through Syria. Tahmasp I, did not accept Anthony Jenkinson's proposals in Qazvin in November 1562, expelled him from the official reception, and even wanted to hand over him to the Ottoman Sultan. Anthony Jenkinson, who survived under the auspices of Abdullah Khan, Beylerbey of Shirvan, was able to leave the country four months later (Yampolsky, 1961, p. 118). Thus, in this point the negotiations of the «Muscovy Company» with the Safavids at the state level ended in failure.

However, Anthony Jenkinson returned to Shamakhi from Qazvin in 1563 and could negotiate trade concessions for the company he represented, at least in Shirvan, which was a part of the Safavid state. Abdullah Khan, Beylerbey of Shirvan signed a decree granting British merchants the right to trade freely in the territory of Shirvan, exempting imported and exported goods from customs. The second

trade expedition of the «Muscovy Company», consisting of Thomas Alcock, George Wren, Richard Cherrie visited Azerbaijan in 1563-1565, selling their imported goods in Shamakhi, Qazvin and other cities, and buying raw silk and other goods sent to Moscow via the Caspian-Volga road. However, this visit did not yield the desired results, as London merchants were not accepted at the state level. On the other hand, the third visit of the representatives of the British trading company «Muscovy» to the Safavid state in 1565-1567 was successful.

In 1566, Shah Tahmasp I received Arthur Edwards, a representative of the company, and based on the economic interests of his country, asked the ambassador to explain him about British goods, goods of neighboring countries, and Anglo-Russian trade relations and the Kholmogor-Astrakhan trade route. Shah Tahmasp I, who had already established direct trade relations with Western European countries, had promised to sign a decree on the immunity of the merchants of the Muscovy Company. When Shah asked A. Edward about the possibility of bringing 100,000 tons of broadcloth rolls from Britain every year for the needs of the Safavid state, the English merchant said that they could even bring 200,000 tons of the broadcloth rolls to the country. It is clear from the notes of A. Jenkinson, R. Cherrie and A. Edwards that the woven textile played an important role in Britain's exports to the Eastern countries, including Azerbaijan.

In a letter dated April 26th, 1566, A. Edwards wrote that 11 bales of silk, 25-26 batmans (batman was a unit of mass used in the Ottoman Empire and among Turkic peoples, 1 batman is equal to seven pounds) each, were purchased to be shipped from Shamakhi to England and the value of each batman of raw silk was 60-70 shahis (1 shahi is two percent of the tumen). A. Edwards bought 223 batmans of the fabric which was brought from Gilan to Samakhi (one batman of fabric was sold for five pence) and sent them to England as a sample.

The ruler of Azerbaijan, Tahmasp I, to meet the needs of the palace for European goods gave a state order to English merchants. A. Edwards wrote that, Shah ordered to him to bring from England to the Safavid country a fabric woven with gold and silver threads, velvet with gold thread, red, burgundy, green and black fabrics, all kinds of satin, 100 rolls of densely woven wool fabric, 3-4 sets of shields, 10-12 armored clothes made of good iron, 10-12 rolls of solid woven colorful fabric, 6 rolls of fine Dutch canvas, 12 pistols and 100 brushes (Shahmaliyev, 1957, p. 113).

In a letter to his government dated August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1566, A. Edwards expressed his conviction that he could take

income by expanding the relations of the British trading «Muscovy Company» with the Safavid country, importing and selling woven fabrics and buying raw silk, yarn and spices through its permanent representatives. He estimates that the company could earn 30,000 to 40,000 pounds a year from this trade.

A. Edwards studied the trade in Azerbaijani cities in depth to give the necessary recommendations to the company and English merchants. For example he noticed that as the English red calico did not cost more than 18 shahis in the bazars of Shirvan and other regions of Azerbaijan, there were more purple-colored Oriental fabrics of Venetian dyeing in the bazars, also that the locals preferred broadcloth. The rich preferred the delicate broadcloth, while the poor preferred the thick English broadcloth. It was possible to sell one arshin of elegant black, chestnut-black, dark-colored broadcloth in these markets for 20 shahis (1 shahi is one of 200 in the tumen), or even a little more expensive. Then, A. Edwards advised English merchants to send these goods to the Safavid markets. Another English merchant, Richard Wils, inquired about the types and varieties of goods sold in the Safavid markets, he wrote to his government in 1568 that in exchange for English goods, it was possible to buy raw and processed silk of all colors, various spices, dyes, precious stones, pearls, all kinds of carpets and other expensive goods. As broadcloth were produced in London, silk was obtained in Safavid cities.

A delegation of «Muscovy Company» consisting of A. Edwards, J. Spark, L. Chapman, H. Dovest visited the Safavid state in 1568-1569, when Shah Tahmasp I signed a new decree concerning of English merchants. The new decree of 1568, which differed in content from the decree of 1566, gave English merchants the right to use their money to stay in caravanserais, rent a house, buy food, and establish a trading post in any city. The decree also reflected the transportation and placement of goods of traders, ensuring the safety of traders and their goods, as well as other issues.

The state-level care for the company's representatives stemmed from the Safavids' economic interest in expanding trade relations with Western European countries. As a result, English goods increased in the Safavid bazars. In a letter sent to London on April 28, 1569, L. Chapman stated that English merchants traded with their goods in the cities of Shamakhi, Ardabil, Qazvin, and Tabriz and he himself bartered three bolts of black broadcloth for 84 batman, as well as he pointed out that he also sold each bolt of broadcloth for 150 shahis.

However, L. Chapman could not sell the goods, especially the broadcloth. He wrote that the Shah never bought

broadcloth for the Treasury, he sold raw silk to Georgians and Armenians in cash. Despite some difficulties and obstacles in the 60s and 70s of the 16th century, the Safavid-British trade relations through Russia via the Caspian-Volga route were mutually beneficial. In this way, Britain freely entered the markets of the rich East, including the Safavids, without facing competition from the Ottomans, Venice and Portugal, and bought and sold silk and spices at low prices. It was two or three times cheaper for the British because it was shorter and safer than the ocean route. Trade with the Safavid state through the Caspian Sea brought great profits to the «Muscovy Company». While the company's annual income was 42 percent, in 1579 it earned 108 percent income from trade in the Caspian Basin (Yunusova, 1988, p. 35).

Undoubtedly, Britain's attempts to expand economic ties with the Safavids via the Volga-Caspian route irritated Russia. As early as 1569, Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible, granting privileges to «Muscovy Company», British trading company, set a condition that the company must obtain permission from the Russian government to send representatives to the Safavid state every year. On the other hand, under the pretext of Britain's refusal to enter into a military alliance with Russia against Poland, Sweden and Lithuania, Ivan IV confiscated all the privileges of «Muscovy Company», confiscated its property and ordered the company to suspend shipments from Yaroslavl and Astrakhan to Shamakhi. For this A. Jenkinson went to Moscow in 1571, and with great difficulty managed to persuade Ivan IV to restore the privileges of the «Muscovy Company».

However, in 1572, Russia imposed heavy customs duties on the goods of English merchants. According to Rybar (2020, p. 612) trade interests are inherently related to political interests, which in terms of Shirvān and its position in Russo-Safavid relations was demonstrated predominantly during the Ottoman-Safavid war in 1578-1590. The year 1586 can be considered the beginning of regular Russo-Safavid diplomatic relations. The main purpose of these diplomatic negotiations was the attempt of Safavid Persia to gain support of Muscovy in the battle against the Ottoman Empire. Shirvān constituted an important point of these negotiations, especially concerning the cities of Darband and Baku which were occupied by the Ottomans.

After that, the British government was forced to concentrate on the Persian Gulf. In 1588, Britain destroyed the Spanish navy, the Great Armada, its main rival and in 1600 founded the «East India Company», successfully competing with Portugal in the Persian Gulf. The British government began to send envoys to the palace of Shah Abbas I. Finally, in 1615, Shah Abbas I allowed to the

representatives of the East India Company, Steel and Glauzer, to establish a trading post in Jask. Three years later, in 1618, Shah Abbas I gave the British an exclusive right on the silk trade. In addition, the Safavid government stopped selling silk to Spain and Portugal. In 1619, English trading posts were established in Bandar Abbas, Shiraz and Isfahan (Tumanovich, 1982, p. 45).

Thus, in the second half of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, despite all obstacles, Safavid-British trade relations expanded, especially the export of silk goods to England had significantly increased. One of the factors for this outcome was that trade routes with India were well maintained and protected during most of the Safavid period. Highway police (rahdars) patrolled roads effectively enough for merchants, even in small caravans, to travel without need for armed guards, at least until the late Safavid period when security conditions deteriorated (Matthee et al., 2013, p. 56).

## CONCLUSIONS

The economic relations of the Safavid state of Azerbaijan with England in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century - the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were marked by a series of meetings between the Shah and British diplomats, who sought to negotiate important agreements seeking commercial advantage. However, due to geopolitical factors, the British were forced to make an agreement with the Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible to take advantage of trade routes more efficiently, which led to the foundation of «The Muscovy Company». So due to intensive trade during this period, the territory of Azerbaijan had a remarkable progress that was seen in different facets of life, from education to access to foreign products that improve the quality of life of the population. This exchange increased the already rich value of the region that is known to be the convergence of multiple cultures.

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