

Azerbaijan on the Great Silk Road between China and Europe (Historical Survey)

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Abstract

ince the end of Prehistoric times, there have been trading relations between the countries. For comprehensive and permanent trade, the country must have rich natural resources, raw materials, and favorable geographical conditions. Almost all of these are available in Azerbaijan. For this reason, Azerbaijan has always played an crucial role in the realization of trade relations, including China, one of the ancient trade centers. From time immemorial, China's trade relations with Western countries have passed through the territory of Azerbaijan. Since ancient China was the only country that produced silk, silk was considered the most important fabric in other countries. Therefore, it stood in the most significant place in trade. That is why this trade became known as the Silk Road. Silk Road trade became more widespread in the Middle Ages. This paper deals with the history of the Silk Rod in Azerbaijan. The author uses different primary and secondary sources for her academic analyzes.

Index terms— azerbaijan, china, trade, silk road, relationship, history.

1 Introduction

ince the end of Prehistoric times, there have been trading relations between the countries. For comprehensive and permanent trade, the country must have rich natural resources, raw materials, and favorable geographical conditions. Almost all of these are available in Azerbaijan. For this reason, Azerbaijan has always played an crucial role in the realization of trade relations, including China, one of the ancient trade centers. From time immemorial, China's trade relations with Western countries have passed through the territory of Azerbaijan. Since ancient China was the only country that produced silk, silk was considered the most important fabric in other countries. Therefore, it stood in the most significant place in trade. That is why this trade became known as the Silk Road. Silk Road trade became more widespread in the Middle Ages. This paper deals with the history of the Silk Rod in Azerbaijan. The author uses different primary and secondary sources for her academic analyzes.

2 II.

3 Before Silk Road

It is possible to observe from historical sources that trade was carried out in the territory of Azerbaijan from the 2nd century BC. In ancient times, there were two states in the territory of Azerbaijan -Albania in the north of Azerbaijan and the state of Atropatene in the south. Both countries played an important role in the trade from east to west and from west to east. Azerbaijan's favorable strategic location allowed it to control this trade. Azerbaijan's rich natural resources and raw material sources attracted traders from all over the world. The parallel location of the Caspian Sea to the trade route from east to west doubled Azerbaijan's importance in trade. That is why the great empires were always trying to capture Azerbaijan, especially its northern part. It is possible to observe the invasions of the Roman Empire to the territories of Albania from the 1st century BC. They had only one goal, to reach the Caspian Sea and control the trade route. Just one example is the march of

Pompey, who tried to invade Albania in 66-65 BC. Although the Albanians lost two battles during this campaign, the Qabala -the capital of the state was not captured by the Romans, and they failed their goals ??Abdullayev, 2018: 31). According to Strabo, Albina is also a very productive country under the influence of the Kura River, where crops are harvested twice a year. According to him, various fruits are grown here, many of which are not found anywhere (Strabo, IX, 4, 2-3). It is possible to say that traders from many countries came to Azerbaijan to buy fruits that are not available in many parts of the world. Pliny the Elder writes that one of the rivers in Albania is so salty that salt can be collected from the river (Pliny the Elder, XXXI, 74).

In Atropatene, salt was extracted from the mines. Also, oil, which is unique in the world, was extracted here. People used oil both to treat patients and to light rooms. They were also skilled in making fish oil and strong glue from fish innards. Iron, copper, lead, silver, gold, and other metals were extracted here. Ornamental articles discovered during archaeological excavations testify to the well-developed skills of the country's jewelers. ??Abdullayev, 2018: 24-25). All these facts give us reason to say that a country with such wealth has been a favorable market for merchants. There is no doubt that Chinese merchants, who have been traveling to different countries for trade since ancient times, also visited Azerbaijan.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, Albanians and Huns lived in the neighborhood. The Chinese historian Sima-Qian records in this work titled "Records of the Grand Historian" about the information on the Jean-Xiang, the emissary of Emperor Wu-Di (140-83 BC). He called the Amu Darya "Gui Shu" and wrote: "There are merchants and tradesmen living there, who distribute their goods to neighboring possessions by road and sea, even for a few thousand" ??Bigurin, 1950: 149-150; ??amedov, 2005: 20).

China's relationships with Hun Empire played an important role at the early stage of the Azerbaijani-Chinese relations since the Huns, who had been lived in neighborhood of the North of Azerbaijan (Albania), were the ancient ancestors of the Turks; the Azerbaijanis inherited many cultural and military traditions of Huns. Hunnic-Chinese relations were of a varied nature: trade ties, political relations. For example, the first Hunnic-Chinese treaty was concluded in 198 BC. According to the contract in 198 BC, the Chinese annually supplied the Huns with silk, wine, rice, etc. The Chinese also bought horses from the Huns. As stated in legend, Zhang Qian, a diplomat-traveler, a dignitary of Emperor Wu of Han, saw horses in the Fergana Valley that struck him with their beauty in the II. BC. He offered Emperor Wu of Han to take silk, wine, sweet fruit abroad in exchange for horses ??Akhundova, 2016: 11).

From the beginning of the Middle Ages, trade between East and West has been expanding. In such a situation, both China and Azerbaijan could not stay out of this trade. Because both countries had an ancient foundation and natural opportunities for trading.

4 III.

Silk Road in Medieval Age II century can be considered a starting point for the birth of the Silk Road, which existed until the II millennium of 16th century. With the foundation of the Silk Road, different travelers, diplomats, missionaries, merchants, etc., from various countries, who traveled great distances from Europe via Azerbaijan, Iran, and Central Asia to China, left valuable information about the countries where they arrived. In all times of Medieval period, the Great Silk Road was the main economic factor connecting the empires of Byzantium Empire and the Arab Caliphate, India, Mongolia, China, passed through the territory of Russia, the countries of Central Asia, and the South Caucasus. This is known from the writings of researchers and travelers: the Chinese Xuan Jian, the Italian Marco Polo, Arab Ibn Fadlan, the Russian Afanasy Nikitin, and others (Mahmudova, 2012).

During the Middle Ages (III-XV centuries), the relations between China and Azerbaijan continued to evolve. For example, goods from India and China first came to the markets of Azerbaijani cities in the III-VII centuries (Aji M, 2014; ??abibzade, 2009: 25). Within these immense boundaries, the Great Silk Road helped develop towns, agriculture, private farming, and silk production and established land and sea transport routes. It was a unique economic process in the history of Eurasian civilization.

Azerbaijan on the Great Silk Road can be taken as an example to illustrate these arguments with different aspects. As we have emphasized before, Azerbaijan ties as a bridge in the Caspian region, connecting the Caucasus, Middle East and, northeastern Europe. After the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Arab Caliphate, the trade route passed into the possession of the Arabs. In Arabic sources, there is a lot of information about the Great Silk Road. Especially interesting reports are from Ibn Fadlan, Al-Istakhri, Abu Dulaf and others. At that time, the cities of Derbent, Beylagan, Barda, Ardebil, Tabriz, Maraga, Nakhchivan, etc. played a significant role in the relations of trade between Azerbaijan and other countries. Trade routes of Azerbaijan linked these cities to other countries of Asia, Africa, and Europe ??Velikhanli, 1987: 50-70; ??unyadov, 1965: 38-58).

In the Middle Ages, Maragheh Observatory, located on the territory of South Azerbaijan, was founded as the largest scientific center of its era. This observatory had an enormous impact on the development of astronomy in many countries. The prominent Azerbaijani scientist, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, arrived in Maragha with Hulagu Khan, who instructed him to build an observatory here. Until the end of his life, Tusi supervised the scientific and administrative work of the observatory.

The observatory in Maragha was the first Academy of Sciences in the Middle Ages, not only in the countries of the East but also in Europe. In the observatory, apart from the observation platform, special rooms for large

instruments, rooms for a library of 400,000 books, other auxiliary premises were supposed. Here a huge storage was created with spacious rooms filled with books taken from Baghdad, Mosul, Syria and Khurasan.

A large team of scientists from Iran, Syria (Damascus), and the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia, China, and India, worked at the Maragheh Observatory. More than 100 employees, both scientists and their students, worked at the Maragheh Observatory and Library. ??Ibn al-Fuwati, 1962 ??1967: 19) The names of many of them have remained in history. These are Muhammad Nasiraddin Tusi, Qutb ad-Din Shirazi, Grigory Abul-Faraj, Muayid-ad-din al-Urdu from Damascus, Najm ad-din Qazvini, Dabirani al-Katib from Qazvin, Fakhr ad-din al-Akhlati from Tiflis, Fakhr ad-din al-Maraghai from Mosul, Mohi ad-din Kamal Sheikh-Kamal, Najm ad-din al-katib al-Baghdadi from Baghdad, Fao Mun-Chi, a Chinese astronomer who worked here for several years, Kamal ad-Din Aflatun al-Hindi (from India), Ibn al-Fuwati, Sadr ad-Din Ali and several others. ??Rezevi, 1994: 41) This observatory was one of the most famous for its time. It survived only two generations: after the first half of the 14th century. The remains of the building have survived to this day. ??Seyidbeyli, 2015: 144) Early and Middle Medieval Age, Azerbaijan, where covers from Darband to Hamadan, was one of the richest territories in the Asia. Persian historian Hamdullah Mustoufi-e Ghazvini (1280-1349) have written that income stood at 25 million dinars during the period of the Seljuks and Atabeks' and under the Shirvanshah states in work titled "Nozhat al-Gholoob". This works give us to make an impression about the other regions in XIII-XIV centuries: Iraq-i Arab -30 million dinar; Iraq-i Ajam -25 million dinars; Arazi-ye Rum -15 million dinars; Georgia -5 million dinars (Hamd-Allah Qazwin, 1919: 78-90). Another Arabian historian, Yagut al-Hamawi (1179-1229), had earlier described the historical reality reflected in these figures as follows: 'Azerbaijan is a vast country and a great state' in his work titled "Mujam al-Buldan" (Hamavi, 1983: I, 159-161).

Such a strong economy had to be well-founded. Among other reasons, the Great Silk Road and Azerbaijan's silk industry had played an important part. Marco Polo, who travelled to the Mongolia and China in 1271-1291, wrote about Azerbaijan's central city, Tabriz: 'Tawris is a huge city? Its residents are engaged in trade and craftsmans. They produce silk fabrics, that are very expensive. Different things are brought in from India, Baghdad, Mowsul, the Bay of Hormuz, and other places. Latin merchants, especially those from Genoa, flood the city with their goods.' Marco Polo did not call Tabriz an Iranian city. (Polo M. 1903: 60-65).

There is no substantial change in the 14th-15th centuries in trade via Azerbaijan. European travelers and merchants started to widely travel to northern Azerbaijan for silk. Rui Gonzalez, who had travelled to the Tamerlane's capital Samarkand in the early 15th century, wrote: 'In Shamakha city, silk is produced in the full quantities. Merchants whom are from Genoa and Venice, come here to buy silk.' Ambrogio Contarini who was sent from Venice to Bayandurlu Sultan Hasan Padishah's palace in Tabriz, described the country -the Shamakhi (Shirvan)-made silk was known as 'Talaman silk'. Azerbaijan traded silk with Russia in the period of Safavids and Afshars. With the establishment of capitalist manufacturing in Europe in the 16 th -17 th centuries, the was forced for Eastern raw materials and trades grew sharply. However, the route of trade to the Indian Ocean via the Atlantic Ocean was controlled by the Portuguese. Ottoman Empire was in control of the route trading through the Mediterranean and Black sea ??Mahmudov, 2012: 127).

At that time, the English made a surprise achievement to gain access to India via the Caspian Sea. In 1561-63, Anthony Jenkinson visited Azerbaijan on behalf of the Muscovy Company and the British crown. He had been charged by Queen Elizabeth with securing a trade deal with Shah Tahmasp I, but he could not achieve this important objective. The shah refused to sign the agreement, as it could have damaged a peace agreement reached with Sultan Suleyman I whom following years of war. The trade deal with the English could have undermined Safavid-Ottoman relations ??Aliyarli, 2009: 715-716).

Back to Jenkinson. Despite his failure to sign a deal with Shah Tahmasp I, Jenkinson did secure a 'decree on privileges' from the shah's beylerbeyi, or representative in Shirvan, Abdulla Khan Ustajli. The decree said: 'Considering the persistent requests by envoy Antony Jenkinson, we, Abdulla Khan, who rule Shirvan and Herkan, with the blessing of Allah, creator of the Earth and Heavens, have shown goodwill and kindness to bestow the following residents of London -Sir William Herr, Sir William Chester, Sir Thomas Lodge, Mr. Richard Mallory, and Richard Chamberlain -and their trade company with freedom, the right to cross freely and visit our state?.' ??Aliyarli, 2007: 240).

Antony Jenkinson sold bolts of silk and other things. The another English company leader -Thomas Allcock had visited Azerbaijan for silk in 1563-67. The third English trade delegation with the leadership of Arthur Edwards (1565-67) was successful meetings with Shah Tahmasp I, he secured a decree from the Shah on safety of English merchants. In a letter that had been sent to London from Shirvan, Arthur Edwards wrote: 'We have bought eleven bolts of raw silk, will be send to England. The silk of this region is high quality (English Travelers in the State of Muscovy, 2007: 91-92).

In 1568-69 Edwards, along with three other business people, visited Azerbaijan to buy silk. A fifth trade delegation led by Thomas Bannister and Jeffrey Deckert visited Azerbaijan in 1569-74. A sixth delegation, led by Christopher Barrow, came in 1580. All of them came to Azerbaijan mostly for silk, and they all used the Volga-Caspian route (English Travelers in the State of Muscovy, 2007: 121).

There were two important factors that made these visits possible by S. Alyarly's thought: "a) One of the old routes of the Great Silk Road covered through the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan. This route has been in use throughout history. Guillaume de Rubruques, who was sent by French King Louis IX to meet the Mongolian Khan Mongke in 1253-55 (20 years before Marco Polo's visit), returned to his country via this route -through the

‘Edil Sea’ and the ‘Iron Gate’ built by Alexander -from the north to the south. In 1474, Ambrogio Contarini, the Venetian envoy, led a large delegation from the south to the north (Tabriz-Shamakhi-Derbent). Even the Safavid envoy to Europe, Oruj bay Bayat, preferred this route. b) Azerbaijan was an open country for trade and cooperation. It had an environment of religious and moral tolerance. The head of the German-Holstein embassy, Prof Adam Olearius (1636-39), also mentioned this. He said: ‘Unlike Russia, Azerbaijan is not a closed country. By paying the required customs duty to the state, locals and foreigners can freely travel in the country. They can also do business and trade here.’ (Aliyarli, 2007, 248) This assessment conforms with the aforementioned ‘decree on privileges’ issued by Abdulla Khan Ustajli, the Safavi baylarbayi (representative) in Shirvan. Diplomat Contarini, meanwhile, noted the ‘human factor’. He said: ‘We left for the town of Derbent, which belonged to the Shirvan shah. We sometimes stayed in Turkish villages. We were welcomed in those villages? To be honest, the people there [in Azerbaijan] were very friendly. When asked who we were, we would reply: “We are Christians.” And this answer would be enough for them.’ (Aliyarli, 2009: 460-466).

European diplomats and merchants preferred the Volga-Caspian route to the Black Sea route (via Georgia and Crimea), although the latter was shorter.

Silk and the Russian empire Silk production has had a great role in developing of the silk industry and capitalist society in Russia. The Russian envoy to the Safavid state between 1715 and 1718, A. Volinsky, wrote: ‘There are many cattle, sheep and fish there [in northern Azerbaijan]. They [Azeris] are particularly engaged in silkworm breeding. Silkworms are bred everywhere in large quantities. Only a few villages near the seashore and the River Kur lack silk mills.’ (Aliyarli, 2009: 472-476).

Fifty years later, Academician Shamuil Gmelin wrote that there were nearly 1,500 silk-weaving looms and ‘silk mills’ in Shamakhi. Another Russian spy, Serebrov Dzhulfinskiy, wrote 20 years later: ‘In Shamakhi, almost every resident of the town has a workshop or is a silk weaver.’ The Russian occupation of Azerbaijan in the 19th century brought about fundamental changes in the country’s social and economic life. However, silk production and trade retained their importance. In 1850-70, silkworm production grew fivefold and reached 150,000 pounds (2,400 tons). The Nukha (Shaki) province accounted for 61,000 pounds of this.

Shusha, Shamakhi and Jar-Balakan were also centers of silkworm breeding. Each province produced between 3,000 and 5,000 pounds of silkworms a year. Northern Azerbaijan accounted for 85 percent of silkworms produced in the South Caucasus. It also accounted for 75 percent (28,000 pounds) of silkworms required for Russian textiles (40,000 pounds).

At present, the Silk Road does not exist, but the relations between China and Azerbaijan are at a very high level and are comprehensive. Despite the centuries-old history of friendship, diplomatic relations between China and Azerbaijan were established on April 2, 1992. On December 27, 1991, the PRC recognized the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In August 1992, the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China was opened in Azerbaijan and the first ambassador was appointed on December 1, 1993. The Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the People’s Republic of China was opened on September 3, 1993 (Akhundov, 1999: 34).

In March 1994, Heydar Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan, successfully made a historic visit to China. The heads of the two countries signed and published the “Joint Declaration based on Friendly Relations between China and Azerbaijan,” which contributed to the development of bilateral relations and laid a strong legal basis for the successful development of relations. During the official visit of Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to China in March 2005, President Hu Jintao and President Aliyev signed and published a joint communique of the People’s Republic of China and Azerbaijan and witnessed the signing of twelve treaties on cooperation in such areas as trade and economy, customs, information technology, taxes, culture, youth, radio and television, sports, justice, extradition, etc. (Gabibzade, 2009: 15).

In recent years there has been an increasing desire for dynamically developing China to play a more active role as a participant in the new “great geoeconomic game”. The Caspian region has become a region of great geopolitical importance for China. It occupies an important place in China’s foreign strategy.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations today, the PRC supports Azerbaijan and its initiatives in many political decisions. An example of this can be China’s positive position on amendments made by the Azerbaijani side in the Resolution on Cooperation between the OSCE, adopted on December 2, 2002.

Even though Azerbaijan, unlike the Central Asian republics, has no common borders with China. They are separated from each other by thousands of kilometers of distance, very close political, commercial, economic, business, cultural and other relations have been established between these countries.

Chinese companies in Azerbaijan are actively working in the fuel and energy complex and are doing their best to expand their activities in this sector. In particular, CNPC and Shengli are participating in four projects to develop oil fields onshore Azerbaijan -“Kursangi” and “Garabagly”, “South-West Gobustan” and “Pirsaat”. They openly declare their wishes to participate in new, larger projects, up to the development of offshore fields, and are ready to invest heavily in this field. The energy resources of the Caspian Sea are considered as potential sources of oil and gas in China.

The Chinese telephone company Huawei successfully cooperates with Baktelecom, in 2005 the second Chinese company ZTE Corporation has started operating in this sector, and at the end of 2006, Azercell provided the subscribers of the GPRS / MMS roaming service with the operator “China Mobile” from China (Gabibzade, 2009: 32).

The number of joint and purely Chinese enterprises operating in Azerbaijan is growing. If about 30 joint

ventures were established in the republic and 8 Chinese companies were registered by the end of 2006, their number increased significantly in 2008. The prospects of cooperation in agriculture and transport are expanding.

These two countries have a rapidly developing economy, a strong political base, a deep historical connection and strong economic complementarity. Between these countries, the trade and economic volume is rapidly increasing. In 2011, the volume of trade between China and Azerbaijan reached 1,086 billion US dollars, which is 16.5% more compared to 2010 and 700 times more than the volume at the beginning of the establishment of diplomatic relations. China has already become an important trading partner and the fifth largest country -the source of imports for Azerbaijan ??Talibov, 2015: 11).

IV.

5 Conclusion

This is how the South Caucasus region was turned into an economic colony, a producer of raw materials and a market for the output of Russian factories. It became a very productive colony.

The history of silk production and trade shows see some of the serious problems of the history of Azerbaijan, the Caucasus and the Middle East. For hundreds of years, the names of Tabriz, Shamakhi, Shaki and Arash -which are close to our heart -could be heard in the coffee houses of Venice, Marseilles and London. We owe this to the art of silk production. However, we have no moral right to boast about this or take pride in it. If today we are serious about developing the non-oil sector of our economy, and we do need to think about this, we should not forget silk production, which has a long history in Azerbaijan. Otherwise, Azerbaijan will leave another of its national problems unresolved.

The Azerbaijani-Chinese relations in science, education, culture, medicine, etc., are developing on a growing scale. One of the former Chinese ambassadors in Azerbaijan Zhang Haizhou, referring to the development of bilateral educational ties, said: "Quite an intensive exchange was established in the sphere of education. Every year, at the governmental level, the parties mutually grant each other 15 state scholarships for students. Graduates of this project already work in government and diplomatic missions of the two countries. In addition, an annual number of students studying in universities of China and Azerbaijan on the non-governmental line are growing. For example, now more than 200 of our students are educated in Baku. This year, the Government of China also provided a onesided scholarship for study in China for 5 Azerbaijani students (Li Zhen Yin, 2013: 41).¹

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