



SHIRVĀN AND RUSSIAN-PERSIAN TRADE DURING THE REIGN OF SHĀH SAFĪ (1629–1642)¹

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Abstract. The study deals with the issue of Safavid beylerbeylik Shirvān and its role in Russian-Persian trade relations in the period of Shāh Safī I (1629–1642). From the 16th century onward, Russian-Persian trade relations became regular and gradually strengthened and developed. Safavid Persia organised numerous trade expeditions to the Russian territory. Shirvān as a border area in the Caucasus a Caspian region played an important role in Russian-Persian caravan trade. Along with Persian Shah's merchants, Shirvānian beylerbey's merchants also came to Russian cities and tried to gain trade privileges. Besides that, since the 15th century Shirvān was an important centre of raw silk production in Persia. Merchants from Shirvān and Persia imported silk and Eastern goods to Russian markets. The area of Shirvān also served as important crossroads of trade caravan routes. Through Shirvān, Persian merchants travelled (by land or by sea) to the territory of the Russian Tsardom. Based on the analysis of yet unpublished archival materials from the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (relating to the reign of the Persian Shāh Safī (1629–1642)), I will present the above-mentioned issue.

Keywords: Shirvān, silk, trade, Safavid Persia, Russian Tsardom, 17th century, Shāh Safī.

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ШИРВАН И РУССКО-ПЕРСИДСКАЯ ТОРГОВЛЯ В ПЕРИОД ПРАВЛЕНИЯ САФИ I (1629–1642 гг.)¹

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена проблематике сефевидского бейлербейлика Ширвана и его роли в русско-персидских торговых отношениях в период правления шаха Сафи I (1629–1642 гг.). С XV в. Ширван являлся центром производства шелка-сырца в Иране. Иранские купцы (включая ширванских) ввозили на российские рынки шелк и восточные товары. Довольно скоро район Ширвана превратился в важный перекресток торговых караванных путей. С XVI в. по мере развития российско-иранских торговых связей Закавказские владения Сефевидов становятся важнейшим транзитом на пути в Россию, что и предопределило на долгое время стратегическую роль Ширвана как приграничного экономического узла в региональной прикаспийской торговле. Прибывавшие с купцами шаха Сефи I в крупные российские города купцы ширванского бейлербея в 1630-е гг. пытались получить для себя выгодные торговые привилегии, равный с шахскими купчинами статус. Экономическое усиление Ширвана и его влияние на российско-иранскую торговлю рассматривается в статье на основе еще не введенных в научный оборот архивных материалов из Российского государственного архива древних актов (РГАДА), относящихся к правлению персидского шаха Сафи (1629–1642 гг.).

Ключевые слова: Ширван, шелк, торговля, Сефевидская Персия, Русское царство, XVII век, Шах Сафи.

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Given the current knowledge based on archival documents, since the 16th to the mid-17th century, it is possible to observe a positive trend of continuous development of Russian-Persian trade relations carried out through the territory of the Caucasus and Caspian area. Shirvān – both a historical and geographical area in the East of the South Caucasus – became a part of the Safavid Empire in 1538 (as a border administrative entity – Beylerbeylik) and since then played a key role in international trade of this period¹. The main purpose of this case study is to present the significance of Shirvān in Russian-Persian trade relations during the reign of Shāh Safī I (1629–1642). Particular attention will be drawn to the position of Shirvānian beylerbey's merchants in Russian markets and cities. The second key research issue concerns the types of merchandise exported via land (or sea) route from Shirvān to the Russian territory in the period of Shāh Safī I. A more thorough analysis has not been yet carried out and the subject has only been addressed in the context of broader Russian-Persian trade or diplomatic politics.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Shirvān and its role in trade between the Russian Tsardom and Safavid Persia (in the period of Shāh Safī I) has not yet been comprehensively studied. The sole exception is a scholarly work (published in the Slovak language), where the author deals with the above-mentioned issue to a limited extent [Rybar, 2014]. On the one hand, there are works that somewhat point out the issue of Shirvān and its role in the Russian-Safavid trade relations of the 16th and 17th century. These scholarly papers became a source of baseline information for the research. The question was solved primarily in the historical works by Azerbaijani [Aliiev, 1985; Guseynov, 1963; Kurbanova, 1984; Seidova, 2004], Iranian [e.g. Barāzesh, 1392 (2013); Jamālzade, 1358 (1979); Ra'īsnīyā 1380 (2001)], and Russian historians [e.g., Bushev, 1976; Bushev, 1987; Novoseltsev, 1966; Shpakovskiy, 1915; Zevakin, w.y.; Kukanova, 1977]. In addition, one should not overlook the works by Western historians, who have in part dealt with international trade between Persia and European countries (including Russian Tsardom) [Matthee, 1999; Herzig, 1992]. Of particular importance are the archival materials from the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RSAAA or in Russian short as RGADA) in Moscow (Collection 77, Documents related to Russian-Persian matters). Previous works by Azerbaijani historians were focused primarily on the strategic role of the territory, including contemporary borders of Azerbaijan (or Az. SSR) and Azerbaijan province in Iran. Yet, Shirvān's regional role, as a historical and geographical part (beylerbeylik) of the Safavid Empire, was not taken into consideration. Iranian and Russian historians dealt with Russian-Persian relations in the 16th–17th centuries in a generalized way. On the other hand, most recent research by the new generation of Russian historians is focused on a thorough analysis of archival documents. This allows to systematically reveal new facts about Russian-Persian trade and diplomatic relations in the 17th century [Andreev, Kopaneva, 2021; Shorokhov, Slesarev, 2020; Yastrebova,

¹ For General History of Shirvān see works of S. Ashurbeyli or R. Ra'īsnīyā [Ashurbeyli, 2006; Ra'īsnīyā, 1380 (2001)].

Kostikov, 2019]. However, the role of Shirvān in Russian-Persian trade has not been scrutinized so far.

SHIRVĀNIAN MERCHANTS AND RUSSIAN MARKETS

During the 16th and 17th century, Shirvān (as a beylerbeylik) and Shirvānian (or Shamakhian) merchants played a rather important role in Russian-Persian trade. However, research based on Russian archival documents indicates that Shirvānian merchants – as well as numerous Shah's merchants and diplomats – organized several trade journeys to Moscow and other Russian cities. Historians A. Huseynov and E.S. Zevakin report that in the years 1628–1675 Shamakhian khan sent more than 10 official diplomatic and trade missions to Moscow [Guseynov, 1963, p. 185–186; Zevakin, w.y., p. 215–216]. According to Russian historian E.S. Zevakin, the extent of their involvement in this trade is not entirely clear [Zevakin, w.y., p. 3]. Russian historian N.G. Kukanova claims that Shirvānian (or Azerbaijani) merchants played an important intermediary role in Russian-Persian trade [Kukakova, 1977, p. 54, 60]. However, should one take into consideration surviving archival documents, one can state that those merchants have less importance for Russian-Persian trade relations than those belonging to Shah. Nevertheless, both Safavid shah's and Shamakhian khan's (or Shirvānian beylerbey) merchants enjoyed certain privileges in several Russian cities. For example, until 1621 no trade duties were apparently levied on goods provided by Shamakhian khan's merchants [Seidova, 2004, s. 93; Zevakin, w.y., p. 27]. In fact, such customs policy was not profitable to the Tsarist treasury, and therefore a limited amount of duty was reimposed on Shirvānian merchants. However, archival documents dated 1628–1633 confirm that Shirvānian merchants still ran a bargain and paid lower customs duties (e.g., 1/2 or 1/6 of the amount of duty) [Zevakin, w.y., p. 27].

A telling example of the collection of customs duties is the case of Shamakhian Khān Farrukh and his merchants. A letter by Shamakhian Khān addressed to the Duke of Astrakhan and dated 1635 describes how two Shamakhian merchants, called Muhammad Qāsim Beyk (in Russian as Magamat-Kasim-bek) and Hājī Shīr Beyk (in Russian as Haji-Shah-bek) were delegated to Moscow [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, c. 1635, d. 27]. They stayed in Russian Tsardom from 1635 to 1637. In the letter, Farrukh Khān asked the Duke of Astrakhan to provide assistance and protection to his merchants (kirakyāraq), with exemption of trade duties on goods [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, c. 1635, d. 27]. Despite his request, the Shirvānian merchants had to pay trade duties. Subsequently, they continued their journey to Moscow, where they arrived in 1636. At the court, they complained to the Russian tsar that they had been levied a duty of 270 roubles in Astrakhan. After that, the Russian tsar ordered a refund from the cash register [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1649–1650, d. 12, l. 426ob.–427]. In some other cases, Shirvānian merchants did not even have to pay any trade fees. For instance, in 1642, a tsarist decree was sent to Astrakhan, in which Astrakhan boyars I.A. Golitsyn and S.R. Pozharskiy were instructed not to impose customs duties on goods and ships of Shamakhian Khān [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1649–1650, d. 12, l. 428ob.–429ob.]. Sometimes the request of Shamakhian Khān was fulfilled to a limit, so that his merchants

still had to pay a part of the amount of duty on merchandise (from 1/2 to 2/3) [Seidova, 2004, s. 93; Zevakin, w.y., p. 27–30].

Another case is the sending of two merchants Ali-Quli aqa and Rejep by the Shirvānian Beylerbey Arab Khān to the Russian Tsardom. The mission of Shirvānian Beylerbey belonged to a group of three Safavid official trade missions to Russian Tsar held in 1637–1639. The first of them, headed by the Shah's merchant Bīdjan Beyk, was the most numerous (thirty-seven people) and burdened with gifts and goods. Bīdjan Beyk entered the Russian territory in summer 1637 [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1637, d. 3, l. 25]. Another mission by Shirvānian merchants followed them to Astrakhan a few months later (at the end of March 1638). This mission included a smaller number of travellers and had a lower status. The other group of merchants, who arrived in Astrakhan, were representatives of the Shah's treasurer [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1637, d. 3, l. 1]. The collection of documents to these missions contains several preserved draft translations of Persian Letters. One of them is the draft translation of the letter by the Shirvānian Beylerbey Arab Khān addressed to Russian Tsar Michail Fedorovich from 1637 or 1638 [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1637, d. 3, l. 108–109]. All the letters demonstrate that the Shirvānian Beylerbey acted independently, but in a subordinate position to the Safavid Shah. The Arab Khān himself admitted that his Lord (the Safavid Shah) made him the 'ruler' of the Shirvān land. Subsequently, he asked to be accepted 'into the service' to the Russian tsar. For this reason, he sent his merchants Ali-Quli and Rejep to the Tsar and expressed the request to carry out duty-free trade for his subjects. The Arab Khān also sent gifts to the Tsar – two Asian horses called *argamak* [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1637, d. 3, l. 108–109].

Other documents raise the question if Shirvānian merchants were enlisted to the Shah's merchants or not. The list of Shah's goods and merchants includes names of two persons, Khāja Muharram and Rajab Alī, responsible for Shirvānian silk, but it is not clear whether these merchants are the ones sent by the Shirvānian Beylerbey Arab Khān to Moscow. The names of both merchants are not exactly identical across the documents. Another document – a translation of the petition (in Russian '*chelobitnaya gramota*') – by Shah's merchant Bīdjan Beyk, that was delivered to *Posolsky prikaz* by *pristav* Timothy Karaulov (in Russian *Timofej Karaulov*), tells us about some Magomet (Muhammad) and his son Rejep (Rajab), who were left in 1639 with the Shah's goods in the city of Yaroslavl. Later, Magomet left for Moscow to Bīdjan Beyk and Rejep had to stay in Yaroslavl. In Moscow, Bīdjan Beyk asked the Tsar for permission not to pay trade duties and to release Rejep and the goods from Yaroslavl to Moscow [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1637, d. 3, l. 148]. Similarly, in this case, it is not clear, if these two merchants are the same persons mentioned in previous documents or not. On the other hand, the Tsar's officials would often make mistakes in transcribing Persian words, so they could have confused their names. Further research could bring more evidence, thus clarifying whether Shirvānian merchants were also referred to as Shah's merchants in documents.

Another letter by the Shirvānian Beylerbey Arab Khān refers to the late 1640 (the month of Shawwal – from 15th November to 14th December 1640). The letter written in Turkish language was addressed to the Dukes of Astrakhan. Arab Khān asked the Dukes to grant

his man a free transition to the Shah's envoy and merchant Hasan Beyk (in Russian as Asan-bek), who resided on Russian territory in 1640–1641. The letter does not mention any trade matters, however, one could assume that Beylerbey's man went to the Russian Tsardom for this particular purpose. In addition, this is supported by the fact that different documents regarding the mission by Persian merchant Hasan Beyk include information on trade [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1640, d. 2, l. 220].

These findings support the claim that, in the period under consideration, Shirvānian beylerbeys regularly asked the Russian Tsar and officials for duty-free trade (or a fee relief) in Russian cities. Shirvānian merchants mostly did not pay the full amount of trade duty in Russian cities, thus running a profitable trade in the Russian market. Although one should mention that all foreign merchants (including Shirvānian ones) were allowed to trade their merchandise only in those Russian cities where they were permitted to do so. As for the Shirvānian merchants, they enjoyed trade privileges in such cities as Astrakhan, Moscow, Kazan or Yaroslavl. Besides that, they had better positions in Russian markets than in other regions of the East, where their trade rights were more limited [Guseynov, 1963, p. 179].

SHIRVĀNIAN GOODS EXPORTED TO RUSSIAN MARKETS

What regards trade and goods exported to Russian markets by Shirvānian merchants in the period of Safi I, a Persian document provides the following information: "List of goods brought by Khājah Shamsī, merchant of the Shirvānian beylerbey Qazāq khan" [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1637, d. 3, l. 102]. This document is included in the corpus of documents dated 1637, although this particular document refers to an earlier period. This can be confirmed by the fact that Qazāq Khān was the Beylerbey of Shirvān in 1624–1633 [Nasiri, 2008, p. 153]. This means that the document could not have been written later than 1633.

The above-mentioned list of merchandise includes different clothes and fabrics:

Dyed (5) and silvered (1) velvet (altogether six rolls)

Atlas (four bales)

Kutnī fabric (seven bales)

Dārāyī fabric from Tabrīz (35) and Yazd (62) (together ninety-seven bales)

Mutabbaq fabric (four bales)

Sashes (chahāzarei) golden (1), dyed (1), from Kāshān (2) (altogether four pieces)

Scarves with gold thread (forty-seven pieces), silvered (seven pieces)

Taffeta from Ardabīl (ninety pieces);

Metqālī fabric (seven pieces)

Chīt fabric from India (one piece), from Gilān (five pieces)

Goat leather (one hundred and eighty-one pairs)

Twill from India (100), small (40) (altogether one hundred and forty pieces),

Fūteh fabrics (twenty pieces)
 Unknown clothes (five and a half rolls)
 Embossed saffian (seventy volumes)
 Dyed silk from Arash (one thousand six hundred and five hryvnias)
 Curtains (five hryvnias)
 Indigo paint (nineteen and a half pounds)
 Sālū fabric (nineteen pieces)
 Qadak fabric (two hundred pieces)
 Unknown fabric (forty-five pieces)
 Chīt fabric (two pounds and thirty-two hryvnias)
 Sashes from Yazd (six hundred pieces)
 Unknown fabric (three pounds)

The list of goods proves that silk and various silk fabrics were a mainstream merchandise. Dyed silk came from the Shirvānian town of Arash and weighted of the volume of one thousand six hundred and five hryvnias (approx. 328, 7 kg). This is the only commodity stated in the list, which originated in the Shirvān area. In case of other fabrics and clothes, it is difficult to determine whether those were produced in Shirvān or not. In addition, some fabrics were produced in other Persian regions such as Gilān, Kāshān, Yazd, Tabrīz and Ardabīl. Other commodities included fabrics made of cotton, wool or leather.

As for Persian silk exported to the Russian Tsardom, there are other relevant documents. The List of the Shah's goods brought by the merchant Khāja Rahmat (dated August 1630) consists mostly of various types of fabrics, with silk – either raw or dyed – representing the largest amount [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1630, d. 1, l. 22–23]. All silk was imported to Moscow. There is no silk in the list of goods imported to Astrakhan and Tarki. This demonstrates that the Russian Tsar had a monopoly on silk. However, this list of goods does not differentiate the silk of Shirvān origin. It is therefore impossible to elucidate the origin the silk in the List. A few years later, in 1642, the 'List of goods and property of the shah's court brought to Moscow' by Shah's merchant Bījan Bey who came to the Russian Tsardom in 1641, mentions three thousand two hundred feet (dasteh) of Shirvānian silk as well as a number of silk fabrics from other provinces of Persia [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1642, d. 4, l. 9]. It supports the assumption that Shah's merchants delivered silk to the Russian Tsardom from several parts of Persia, including the Shirvān region.

Some information on Shirvānian silk appeared in a few 17th century sources and, subsequently, in a number of recent scholarly publications. What regards goods exported from Shirvān to Russian cities, some historians claim that silk was the mainstream item for export (especially raw silk) [Al'tman, 1947, p. 156–164; Vorobieva, 1971, p. 104–107]. Silk as a commodity, thus, played a critical role in the development of international trade across the Safavid Persia to the Russian Tsardom and across the Ottoman Empire to Western Europe [Smirnov, 1958, p. 10]. In the 16th and 17th century, raw silk was a major item exported from other Persian regions (Gilān, Māzandarān or Kāshān), as well as Shirvān.

German scholar and traveller Adam Olearius, who visited Persia in 1637, noted that about 3,000 silk bales were produced in Shirvān in a good year [Olearius, 1669, p. 241]. The city of Shamakhi was a major Shirvānian centre of silk production, where Persian and other foreign merchants gathered in several *caravanserais* [Olearius, 1669 p. 146, 165]. In addition to the raw silk, merchants from Shamakhi also exported different silk fabrics, carpets, precious stones, spices and other goods to Russian cities [Guseynov, 1963, p. 101–102]. Shamakhi was not an only city where silk was produced. The aforementioned town Arash was another important centre of silk production. Raw silk and silk fabrics from Shirvān were well known in Russian cities, especially in Moscow. This also played an important role in the development of Russian manufacturing workshops [Guseynov, 1963, p. 178]. According to Azerbaijani historian Ch.A. Kurbanova, most part of Persian silk exported to the Russian Tsardom originated in Shirvān [Kurbanova, 1984, p. 198]. The Russian market was not the endpoint of Shirvānian silk supply. Shirvānian silk was then exported via Archangelsk and other Russian ports to Western Europe [Fekhner, 1956, p. 26]. However, silk from Shirvān was of lower quality and less in demand [Matthee, 1999, p. 37]. Moreover, Shamakhi was also an important producer of luxury silk fabrics, which were then sold on Russian markets. These luxury fabrics included atlas, taffeta, velvet, damask, brocade, saffian, various carpets, cloths, ribbons, blankets, belts, decorative threads, various articles of leather, wool and others [Guseynov, 1963, p. 174–176]. Customers buying these rare fabrics and garments mainly belonged to the Russian Tsar court and aristocracy. Besides the mentioned goods, other Shirvānian merchandise was exported to Russian markets. For example, oil and salt were mined in the areas surrounding Baku and then exported to the Russian Tsardom [Ashurbeyli, 1992, p. 251]. Furthermore, cotton and cotton fabrics, saffron, carpets and other goods were among those sold in the then Russia. In addition to domestically produced products, the markets of Shirvān offered luxury goods imported from several oriental regions. For example, Indian spices such as cloves, pepper, nutmeg and others were sold there and exported to Russian markets [Rybár, 2014, p. 91–93].

The significance of Shirvān is also explained by the fact that it was located at the crossroads of important caravan routes that stretched from the Safavid Persia to the Russian Tsardom. Merchants travelling to the Russian territory were able set out on two routes: by the sea and by land. The sea route led from the ports of Baku or Niyazabad (also called Nizovaya) to the north coast of the Caspian Sea. Merchants would navigate ships loaded with goods to Astrakhan, a major Russian East trade centre. In the end of spring or in summer, they regularly went out into the open sea, because, due to strong autumn winds, such a voyage was a lot more challenging. Russian merchants used to choose the same sailing routes to the shores of Shirvān or Gilān [Kostomarov, 1862, p. 109]. There were also land route leading from Shirvān to the city of Astrakhan [Dadasheva, 1977, p. 82–85]. Persian and Shirvānian merchants gathered in the city of Shamakhi and then travelled via the town of Shabran to major Caucasian routes near the town of Darband. From there, they continued their way to the towns of Tarki (the residence of Shamkhal) and Terek. Subsequently, their journey followed from the fortress of Terek via the steppes to Astrakhan [Fekhner, 1956, p. 32]. Russian traveller and merchant Fedot Kotov described this road as

very arduous, as travellers often had to wade across rivers or bypass lakes and streams [Khozhenie, 1958, p. 70]. Several archival reports on the travels by Shah's merchants indicate that they preferred travelling by the land route via the cities of Terek and Tarki to Astrakhan [RGADA, f. 77, inv. 1, 1634, d. 1, l. 140; f. 77, inv. 1, 1639, d. 1, l. 17]. In doing so, they also crossed the Shamakhi and the Shirvān territory over to Russia.

The present study provides some information on Shirvān and its role in Russian-Persian trade in the period of Shāh Safī I. Shirvānian beylerbey used to send his merchants and goods to Russian cities and asked the tsar and his subordinates for duty-free trade. Despite his request, in some cases, Shirvānian merchants were required to pay the trade duty in part. The above-mentioned list of goods provided by the Shirvān merchant Khājah Shamsī confirms that silk and silk fabrics were the mainstream items exported from Shirvān (or via Shirvān) to Russian markets (followed by cotton and leather). Both Shirvānian and Shah's merchants transported their goods to Russian cities by well-known trade routes. Thus, the information gathered in the study suggests that Shirvān (as a beylerbeylik) and Shirvānian (or Shamakhian) merchants played by far not a marginal role in Russian-Persian trade in the period of Shāh Safī I. There are, however, matters yet to be examined. Therefore, further research of archival documents is needed to shed light on Shirvān and its role in Russian-Persian trade of the 17th century.

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