



Iran's Silk Trade During the Turkoman Period; A Bridge Between East and West

Esmail Hassanzadeh^{1*}

1 Associate Professor, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding Author Email: e.hassanzadeh@alzahra.ac.ir

Abstract

Trade has always been a crucial source of revenue for governments, with its own considerations and planning aligned with the nature of governance and the financial system. Iran, as a strategic region and a hub of global trade, has held a central role in world commerce since ancient times, and trade has been one of the key aspects of its economy. A significant portion of the income of the Parthian and Sassanid empires was derived from the silk trade. The connection between the silk trade and politics likely dates back to the discovery of silk and the recognition of its intrinsic and symbolic value. The Sassanid kings viewed silk and its accessories as valuable commodities, not only as ornaments for their court but also as vital elements in the silk trade between China and Europe. (Yarshater, 1377: 644-649)

Commercial mediation, as an economic feature and a legacy of geographical necessity, has continued to the present day. Aware of this strategic position, Turkoman governments sought to remain part of regional and global trade networks by maintaining or modifying local trade practices. The Ottoman embargo against Europe and Iran's restriction on the import of goods from the East, beginning with Sultan Mehmed II and continuing with a complete halt under Sultan Selim I (Dalsasr, 1960: 131-136), led to efforts during the Safavid era to find new routes to access Eastern goods. Turkoman governments, recognizing these challenges, also prioritized trade. In unified empires such as the Mongol and Timurid, the central government was able to address trade obstacles to some extent by imposing order and creating harmony between provinces. However, with the collapse of these empires and the rise of numerous local governments, the diversity of customs and laws became overwhelming.

The period of the Aq Qoyunlu Turkoman was one of the most remarkable eras in Iran's history in terms of both regional and supra-regional governance. This relationship extended beyond politics, with trade playing a significant role in political affairs. Raw silk and related textiles were key commodities in trade relations with both the West and the East during the Turkoman period. This study seeks to highlight the role of silk and its accessories as strategic goods in the interactions between East and West. The presence of Aq Qoyunlu political and commercial delegations at the courts of India and China underscores the importance of the silk trade within the international system of that time. This article identifies silk as a central medium of communication between



East and West and traces its influence in international markets, particularly in Bursa, as well as in major domestic markets such as Tabriz, Hormuz, Yazd, and Baghdad. The geopolitical position of the Turkoman governments necessitated their role as intermediaries in trade between the East and West. Although they represented only a small link in the global trade chain, they revitalized East-West commerce after the stagnation that occurred under the Chohanid and Jalayirid dynasties.

The Aq Qoyunlu showed more interest in world trade than the Qara Qoyunlu. Part of this interest was due to the strategic location of Diyarbakir, situated between the powerful Ottoman and Mamluk empires and near the important Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. As a result, the Turkoman rulers were more eager to establish connections with global powers. Since this article cannot fully cover all aspects of domestic and foreign trade, the research will focus primarily on the foreign trade of silk and will analyze and examine the major international trade routes that passed through Turkoman territory.

Silk was brought from China to Merv in ancient times and later transferred from there to various cities in Iran. Iranian silk, particularly from Shervan, Gilan, and Mazandaran, had buyers in foreign markets such as Bursa, Astrakhan, Kafa, Aleppo, Damascus, and Venice. Silk and other textiles were transported to Astrakhan by ship, where Russian, Venetian, and Genoese merchants competed in the markets. At times, competition from the Italian merchants of the city government drove up prices in the market.

The Turks of Aq Qoyunlu understood this well and became pioneers by extending their influence beyond regional relations and entering world trade, leveraging Iran's role as a mediator. They sourced raw materials for trade through institutions like Gargiraq and began conducting international trade through an institution known as Shah Bandar. Due to the lack of statistical data, the precise economic and financial significance of the silk trade cannot be determined. However, the frequent use of terms related to silk and its associated trade indicates that the silk trade was thriving in Middle Period Iran. In Nizam Qari's Al-Baseh poetry collection and other sources, more than ten terms can be found, including Diba, Dibaj, Parnian, Parnia, Ghaza, Parand, Harir, and others.

Tabriz, as the most important multicultural and multicurrency center, contributed to the flourishing of trade. It served as a bridge between China, India, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe. The presence of a significant number of foreign merchants in Tabriz and other cities demonstrates that the Iranian silk trade, whether in raw silk or textiles, played a key role in connecting the East and West.

Iranian silk textiles, especially those from Yazd, held a prominent position in regional markets such as Astrakhan, Aleppo, Damascus, Bursa, and Calicut, among others. The extensive trade in silk suggests that the indifference shown by Iranian and foreign researchers towards the Turkoman governments was, to some extent, due to their lack of knowledge about the commercial dynamics of the period. The scarcity of historical and documentary sources in Iran has led Turkoman studies to rely on Ottoman documents and records. As a result, a gap can be observed between the documents and their historiography regarding the Turkmens. In historiography, efforts are often made



to portray the Turkmens as small and insignificant governments, while commercial and Sharia documents from Bursa contradict this view, emphasizing the flourishing commercial economy of that era.

Keywords: Iran, Turkoman, Aq Qyunlu, silk trade, east, west.

References

Books

- Abū Bakr Ṭehrānī (1977). *Dīyār Bakrīyeh*, Tehran: Ṭahūrī. [In Persian]
- Bī Nām (2004). *Ḥodūd al-‘Ālam*, Minorski's, Tehran: Dānešgāh-e al-Zahrā. [In Persian]
- Bastani Rad, H. (2016), The Description of Dibay-e chini (Chinese silk) in persain literature, *Conference paper*, 113-124. www.researchgate.net/publication/333295813. [In Persian]
- Bretschneider, Emilii Vasil'evich (2012). (*Irān va Māūarā al-Nahr Dar Neūeštehā-ye čīnī va Moğūlī Sadehā-ye Mīyāna*) Mediaeval researches from eastern Asiatic sources; fragments towards the knowledge of the geography and history of central and western Asia from the 13th to the 17th century, Hāšem Rajabzādeh (translator), (n.p): Tehran: Našre Mūqūfāt-e Mahmoud Afšār. [In Persian]
- Chardin, Jean (2013). (*Safarnāma Šārdan*) urnal du voyage du Chevalier Chardin en perse aux Indes Orientals, Eqbāl Yaqmāeī (translator), Tehran: Nūr. [In Persian]
- Clavīkū (1995). (*Safarnāma*) Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406, Mas‘oūd Rajabnīyā (translator), Tehran: Entesārāt-e Elmī va Farhagī. [In Persian]
- Gāvān, Emād al-dīn Mahmoud (1938). *Rīyāz al-Īnšā’*, Hīyder Ābād Decan:Entesārāt-e Sarkār-e ‘Ālī . [In Persian]
- Ḥāfīz Abrū (1993). *Zobdat al-Tawārīk*, Tehran:Našr-e Wezārat-e Farhang va Eršād-e Eslāmī. [In Persian]
- Ḥāfīz Abrū (1996). *joğrāfiyā-ye Ḥāfīz Abrū*, Tehran: Mīrāt-e Maktūb. [In Persian]
- Ībn Baṭṭūṭa, Abū Abdollāh (1952). (*Safarnāma*) Mohammad Ali Moūahed (translator), Tehran: Bī Nā. [In Persian]
- Inalcik, H. (1980-1981). Osmanli Idare, sosyal ve ekonomik Tarihiyle ilgili belgeler, Bursa - kadi sicillerinden secmeler. Belgeler, c.xiii, s.17,1993. [In Persian]
- Inlacik, H. (1980-1981). Osmanli Idare, sosyal ve ekonomik Tarihiyle ilgili belgeler, Bursa kadi sicillerinden secmeler", Belgeler, c.x, s.14, 1981. [In Persian]
- Kāteb Yazdī, Aḥmed b. Ḥosseīn b. ‘Alī (1966), (*Tārīk-e jadīd-e Yazd*) a new history of Yazd, Tehran: Entesārāt-e Farhang-e Irān Zamīn. [In Persian]

- Mazāherī, Ali (1993). Silk Road, Malek Naserian (translator), Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research. [In Persian]
- -Meybodi, Ghazi Hossein (1997). (ĵādeh Abrīšam). Teranslated by Malek Nāšerīān, Tehran: Mūasesah Moṭāle‘āt va Tahqīqāt-e Farhangī. [In Persian]
- Mostūfī, Ḥamdollāh (1983). Nozhaht al-Qolūb, Tehran: Donīyāī-ye Ketāb. [In Persian]
- Naḵjavānī, Moḥammad b. Hendūšāh (2013). Dastūr al-Kātib fī Ta‘īn al-Marātīb, Tehran: Farhangestān-e Honar. [In Persian]
- Navāeī, Abdul Hosseīn (1991) (Asnād va Mokātebāt-e Tārīkī-ye Irān). Historical Documents and Correspondences of Iran, Tehran: Šerkat-e Enteshārāt-e Elmī va Farhangī. [In Persian]
- Nīmdehī, Abdul Karīm (2014). Kanz al-Ma‘ānī, (Menšāāt Nīmdehī) Tehran: Farhangestān-e Zabān va Adab-e Fārsī. [In Persian]
- Nizām Qārī, Maḥmoūd b. Amīr Aḥmad (2013). Kolīyāt-e Nizām-e Qārī, (Bī ĵā): Enteshārāt-e Maḵles-e Šūrāī-ye Islāmī va Safīr Ardehāl. [In Persian]
- Oun Allahī, Sayyīd Āgā (2010) .(Tārīk-e Pānšad Sāleh Tabrīz) 500-year history of Tabriz, translated by Parvīz Zare‘ Šāh Morsi, Tehran: Amīr kabīr. [In Persian]
- Polo, Marco (1983) (Safarhāī-ye Mākūpūlū). he book of sir Marco Polo the venetian, Rāmīn Golbāng (translator), Tehran: Mūasesea Mošīrī. [In Persian]
- Qazvīnī, Zakarīyā b. Moḥammad b. Maḥmūd (1994). Āṭār al-Balād va Aḵbār al-‘Ībād, Mohammad Morād b. Abdul Rahmān (translator), Tehran: Našr-e Dānešgāhe Tehran. [In Persian]
- Schiltberger, Johannes (2016). (Safarnāma) Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger: a native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396-1427, Sāsān Ṭahmāsebi (translator), Tehran: Amīr kabīr. [In Persian]
- Travelers' writings of Venetians in Iran (Safarnāmahāī-ye Wenīzīān Dar Irān) (2002). Manoūčehr Amīrī (translator), Tehran: Enteshārāt-e kārasmī. [In Persian]
- Vūṭūoqī, Mohammad Bāqer (2016). (Mīrāt-e Darīyānāuārdān-e Irānī Dar Banāder-e čīn). The heritage of Iranian sailors in Chinese ports, Tehran: Pažūhešgāhe Mīrāt-e Farhangī va ĵahāngardī. [In Persian]

- Zamjī Esfazārī, Mo‘īn al-dīn Moḥammad (2018). *Monša’āt Esfazārī*, Tehran: Našre Maḡles-e Šūrāī-ye Islāmī. [In Persian]

Articles

- Davani, J (1993). (Rasāl-e Dar Tahqīq-e ‘Adālat. Maḡaleh Dāneškadeh Adabīāt va Olūm-e Ensāni Dānešgāhe Ferdūsī-e Mašhad) *Treatise on Justice Research, Journal of Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad*, 26(3-4), 1-109. [In Persian]
- Dīnparast, V (2013). (Kānūnhāī-ye Teḡārat-e Abrīšam-e Irān DarDūreh Teīmūrīān va Torkmānān Qarn-e Nohom-e Heḡrī) *Centers of Iran Silk Trade during Timurids and Turkmans Period (9th Century AH), History of Islam and Iran*, 21(11), 95, 1-23. [In Persian]
- Dīnparast, V (2017). (Teḡārat-e k̄ārejī-e Āq Qūūnlūhā) *Foreign trade of Tabriz during the period of Aq Qoyunlu, Social and Economic History Research Journal, Research Institute of Human Sciences and Cultural Studies biannual scientific-promotional journal*, 7(2), 23-38. [In Persian]
- Fragner, B (2000). (Teḡārat Dar Dūre-ye Teīmūrīān) *Trade in the Timurid period, History of Iran during the Timurid period according to the narrative of Cambridge University*, translated by Yaqoub Azhand, Tehran: Jami, pp. 248-270. [In Persian]
- Hintz, W (2001). (Nezām-e Mālīātī Ānātūlī-e Šarqī Dar Qarn-e 15va 16:Maḡmū‘ aeh Maqālāt Yād Pāīandeh,Našre Sālī) *Eastern Anatolian tax system in the 15th and 16th centuries, a collection of Yad Payandeh articles*, edited by Reza Rezazadeh Langroudi, published by Sali, pp. 377-347. [In Persian]
- Hospīān, S (2019). (Armanīān-e Kerīma) *Armenians of Crimea, Peyman Cultural Quarterly*, 89-90, 124-145. [In Persian]
- Pāīydāš, K (2014). (Teḡārat Dar Dūre-ye Āq Qūūnlū) *Ak-Koyunlular Dönemi'nde Ticaret. New History Magazine, Kharazmi University*. [In Persian]
- ṭavāqeb, J. (Abrīšam-e Gīlān) *The Silk of Gilan, Research Journal of Human Sciences*, 143-175. [inPersian]
- Wartma, L (2000). (Safarnāma) *travelogue; Iran section, book of the month of history and geography*, 28-36. [In Persian]