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PARTICIPATION OF ARMENIAN TRADERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDDLE EAST ECONOMY DURING XVII–XIX CENTURIES

Abstract

The present article analyzes the participation of Armenian merchants in the development of the economy as an exceptional social reality in the region. This can also be considered as an expression of peaceful coexistence between Armenian and the local Christian and Islamic religious communities. Thus, from a chronological point of view, the study presents the XVII–XIX centuries when there was a conflict of interests between the great powers in the Middle East. However, even in those difficult times, the Armenian traders were able to expand their activities, connecting the East and the West, thus becoming a bridge between the

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local Middle East and the European societies. This explains the rise in the social structure of the Syrian, Iranian and Iraqi Armenian communities, bringing the traders' progressive contribution to the development of these societies. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that being successful in trade contributes to the preservation of the national characteristics and image of their communities.

This study was carried out by three researchers of the Armenian Communities and Diaspora Department of the Institute of History of NAS RA, based on some monographs, professional encyclopedias, periodical press articles and some other well-known experts' studies in this field.

Keywords: *Armenian traders, Iraq, Iran, Aleppo, economic history, Basra, Baghdad, Old Julfa, New Julfa, caravan routes, Levant, Persian Gulf.*

Introduction

Throughout history, Armenian merchants have played a crucial role in transcontinental trade across Central Asia, India, China and the Mediterranean, facing persistent attacks from various quarters vying for control over the pivotal trade routes.

During the XVI to XVIII centuries the Armenian merchants' role in Eurasian overland trade was significant. Their active participation in global trade during the XVII and XVIII centuries resulted in the establishment of notable Armenian settlements in Middle East, Europe, India and other port cities.¹

The Armenian merchants were not only masters of the trade of the whole Levant, but also had a great share in most considerable towns in Europe; as it was very common to meet with some Armenian traders and/or their agents at various ports of Europe, Asia and Far East.

Old Julfa was an old Armenian village on the Arax river in historical province of Nakhijevan, which became a commercial center for the Levantine raw silk trade in the XVI century. However, due to political disturbances in the region, the majority of Armenians were forced to flee for safer places, with some of them settling along trade routes to indulge in commerce, such as Aleppo, Basra, and further down to the Indian Ocean ports.² Julfa attracted large numbers of new settlers since, being perfectly situated near an international trade location,

¹ See **Alpoyajian** 2003, 98.

² **Alpoyajian** 2003.

connected various trade centers in Asia and Europe. It should be noted that Armenians had been involved in commerce for centuries; however it was only with the emergence of New Julfa as the nucleus of the Armenian trading networks that they were organized as one of the most dominant groups in the long-distance trade in the Eurasian continuum in the early modern era. The establishment of New Julfa in the XVII century marked an unplanned yet significant chapter in the history of Armenian merchantry. For political and economic reasons, in 1604 Shah Abbas I forcibly deported the Armenians of Eastern Armenia to inner Persia. He resettled the deported Armenian professional merchants and artisans to the outskirts of the Persian capital, Isfahan, forming a burgeoning township renowned as New Julfa (Nor Jugha) after their hometown, Julfa (Jugha) on the Arax River.³

The Armenians successfully expanded trade routes, developed new markets, and contributed significantly to the economic and military aspects of the XVII century Persia. The Armenian merchants of New Julfa were the main source of the very substantial importation of silver into the Persian realm in exchange for Iran's raw silk.

The economic affluence of Armenian merchants in Persia, particularly in New Julfa, ceased with the Afghan invasion of Persia in 1722.⁴ This incursion inflicted significant casualties and losses on New Julfan Armenians, compelling numerous prominent merchant families to migrate to neighbouring countries such as Basra, Baghdad, India, Russia and various regions in Europe.

The authors of this study scientifically analyzed the participation of Armenian merchants in the development of the economy of the Middle East in the XVII–XIX centuries. Having various external economic ties, Armenian merchants expanded economic cooperation with other traders in every part of the world. Moreover, although having no interstate support at its core, Armenian and foreign interested figures were included in this cooperation. On the other hand, the trade and economic cooperation of the Middle East with Europe was also an important means of communication with the world and it also gained a humanitarian significance.

The purpose of the research is to present, based on the facts, the characteristics and peculiarities of the participation of Armenian merchants in the development of the economy of the Middle East in the XVII–XIX centuries.

³ See **Grigorian** 1974, 670.

⁴ **Alpoyajian** *ibid.*

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The following tasks arise from the above:

1. To present the process of the economic development of the Middle East in the XVII–XIX centuries against the background of the conditions of Armenian merchants' participation.
2. To reveal the social relations and political components of the trade of the time.
3. To emphasize the participation of the Armenian communities in the international trade of the time.
4. To reverberate the registered problems in the area.
5. To highlight and emphasize the historical role and progressive significance of Armenian merchants in the region.

This study is based on a variety of historical sources such as archival documents published in several works, trade agreements, as well as some valuable monographs, scientific articles, professional encyclopedias, and a number of periodical articles.

The participation of Armenian merchants in the development of the economy of the Middle East in the XVII–XIX centuries has been considered from different angles in Armenian and foreign historiography. Those views are reflected in the works of a number of researchers, including researches about the above-mentioned historical period brought to light by the European authors of the XVII–XIX centuries. The analysis of these works continues in new ways up to the present time.

The studies conducted by several Persian, Arab and Armenian authors were also useful, and in the relevant subsection we make our conclusions proceeding from the results achieved.

In this regard the works of Professor Vahan Bayburdyan are noteworthy, where the author among other issues has comprehensively reflected on our topic of interest.

Thabet A. J. Abdullah, an Iraqi-Canadian scholar has extensively discussed among other issues, the participation of Armenian merchants in his **“Merchants, Mamluks and Murder, The Political Economy of Trade in Eighteenth-Century Basra”**.

The topic of this research has a modern theoretical, historical, as well as practical significance, as it shows the positive and progressive role that Armenians

once played in the said era of the Middle East, which is distinguished by the current military and political tension.

Armenian Merchants activities – Persia, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Aleppo

Because of their very important geographical location, the Middle East countries have always been regarded as the center of attention of the Great Powers throughout history. These countries were also the center of lively commercial activities including the Persian Gulf port cities and the Mediterranean Syrian port of Aleppo. In addition to being seaports, Basra and Aleppo were unique in that they were both “desert ports” or caravan cities. Both city-ports were located at the intersection of Mesopotamian and Arabian deserts, thus the merchants residing and working there enjoyed easy caravan communication, which helped them connect with Alexandretta, western Anatolia, Istanbul, and Europe.

Iraq’s communication channels have been its two rivers – the Tigris and Euphrates, which are joined at the north of Basra forming the navigable Shatt El Arab River. According to Herodotus, Armenians developed trade relations with the outside world. Accordingly, they traveled from Armenia to Nineveh and Babylon by rafts and by land, introducing Armenian wine, wood, wheat, horses, etc.⁵

During the Sassanid dynasty (AD 224–651), when Mesopotamia (Iraq) was under the Persian rule and Ctesiphon was its capital, it had numerous Armenians of different professions, and artisans of diverse trades such as merchants, goldsmiths, and scholars. However, frequent plague attacks reduced the number of the inhabitants of these mercantile city centers. The Iraqi Armenian orientalist Vartan Melkonian states that because of frequent plague attacks, the Armenians among other inhabitants of the country, also abandoned Ctesiphon in search of safer places, spreading southwards, towards India, where some of them lost their identity and integrated into the Indian society.⁶

During the Arab expansion in the VII century, Armenia was also conquered, and numerous Armenians were brought to Mesopotamia (Iraq) during the Abbasid caliphate.⁷

⁵ Herodotus 1986.

⁶ Melkonian 1957, 2.

⁷ Ohanian 2016, 7. The Iraqi historian Father R. Babu Isaaq states that the Armenians who were brought to Mesopotamia as hostages, founded a monastery in the eastern part of

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However, the roots of the organized modern community can be traced back to 1604, when Shah Abbas I transferred the entire population of Arax and Ararat valleys, including the Armenian mercantile city of Julfa, where Armenian merchants had connections with European and Far East merchants, to the new quarter of New Julfa in Isfahan.⁸

In this regard, Khosrov Chaqueri, a modern Iranian historian, confirms that although the number of the Armenians in Iran formed a minority, yet they contributed greatly to the social development, cultural progress, intellectual and political support in general. Thus, the members of the Armenian community had a significant role in different periods of Iranian history. Moreover, they participated in the MAKING of that history and were not ordinary observers and/or consumers.⁹ The Armenians were known to be skillful integrators of European models and Asiatic motives.

It is noteworthy that the exclusivity of the Iranian-Armenian community – in particular Isfahan/New Julfa – consists in the fact that it gave birth to several newly formed Armenian communities. It is well-known that in the XVII–XVIII centuries communities were created in India, South-East Asia as well as the Far East countries, that were originated from the New Julfan community. These communities were formed by the Armenian merchants who were active in international trade. Their trading stations abroad later gave birth to large and small communities and settlements in the abovementioned countries.¹⁰

To manage and satisfy the social and spiritual needs of these communities, a new diocese was created in Persia-Iran with New Julfa as its center. The authority of this diocese extended and included the Armenian communities in India, Basra, Baghdad and a number of other regions.¹¹ Therefore, favorable preconditions were created for strengthening the relations between the Armenians of Basra and Baghdad who came from New Julfa, especially since they were part of the same diocese. Thus, it is obvious that this spiritual connection between the above cities was enough to initiate serious commercial activities in the region, and the wide

Baghdad and named it St. Mary in memory of their native country. The monastery was famous for its spacious courtyard and beautiful sculptures. See Babu Isaaq 1948, 154–155.

⁸ Ohanian 2013, 92.

⁹ Bayburdyan 2013, 9; Chaqueri 1988, 1–51; Iranshahr II, 1193; Rezaei, Farnia 2023 249–273; Berberian 2008, 262–292; Mkrtchyan 2018, 68–87; Mkrtchyan 2022, 140–147.

¹⁰ Bayburdyan 2013, 6.

¹¹ Bayburdyan 2014, 686–691.

geographical boundaries of the diocese with human and material resources, increased these possibilities.

In the XVII century, the Armenian merchants of New Julfa became mediators in the international trade between the East and the West. In 1617 Shah Abbas I cancelled the trade contract with England and entrusted the export of silk trade monopoly entirely to the Armenian merchants of New Julfa.¹²

The trade activities of Iranian-Armenian merchants were not limited to the markets of the Mediterranean countries, but went out to various European city-ports, where they had their permanent trade representatives and/or agents.¹³

However, starting from the middle of the XVIII century, due to sociopolitical reasons in Iran, the Armenian community was rapidly being deserted, and its inhabitants emigrated to Europe and Asia, enriching the communities there. Most of the latter were founded by the Armenian merchants in the XVI–XVII centuries, forming the Armenian diaspora through voluntary migration.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is worth noting, that at the end of the XVIII century during Qajar domination, Armenians still had significant role in the court.¹⁵

Judging from the abovementioned situation, it is obvious that Basra and Baghdad were also the main destinations of migration. However, bearing in mind the fact that the economic activity of any community is largely interrelated with the general economic and political situation of the host country, it is therefore necessary to elucidate the sociopolitical life of Mesopotamia/Iraq long before the arrival of the Armenian merchants of New Julfa. It presented the following picture:

The main port of Iraq, Basra was founded in 638 and, being located in the south of the country, it was a center for unloading ships from the ports of the Indian Ocean and transferring them to the caravan routes such as Baghdad, Aleppo and others.¹⁶

Basra's location near the northernmost point of the Persian Gulf, was ideal as a transit area in the East-West trade. The elongated shape of this Gulf, with

¹² **Badalyan** 2011, 591.

¹³ **Bayburdyan** 1999, 270–271.

¹⁴ **Bayburdyan** 2013, 20.

¹⁵ **Tajaryan** 2022, 334–354.

¹⁶ **Ohanian** 2013, 93.

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Masqat at its entrance and Basra at its terminus, linked the Middle East to the Indian Ocean.¹⁷

In the XVIII century, although Shatt al-Arab had many benefits, it also presented some serious difficulties. During the rainy season, the river would usually overflow, which caused people to cut trenches letting the water flow into the desert. The pools that were formed around the city acted as breeding grounds for several deadly diseases, such as malaria, plague, etc.¹⁸ In fact, the entire Indian Ocean region, including the Persian Gulf, was affected by the annual monsoons.

However, Basra was already in decline long before the Mongol invasion in 1258. During the XIV century the canals and dams which provided the city's fresh water supply were neglected and gradually deteriorated. When the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta was passing through this city, he found it in ruins and its few inhabitants in the process of relocating closer to the river near its present site.¹⁹ By the XV century the city's canals had deteriorated to the extent that fresh water became exceedingly difficult to find. The status of the new city did not improve until its occupation by Safavid Persia in 1508.²⁰ The Ottoman conquests in 1534 and 1546 accelerated the process of integrating Basra within the commercial network of the empire.

In 1596, however, for various reasons the Ottoman governor simply sold the city to a local official named Afrasiyab, whose son Ali and grandson Husayn did their utmost to make the city secure through consolidation of the Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman empires and the increasing participation of Europeans in the Asian trade.²¹

From the XVI century to the last quarter of the XVII century, Iraq, like other countries in the region, became the scene of frequent and bloody conflicts between the Safavid Persia and the Ottoman empire. Only in 1699, because of various political situations, the Ottoman Empire could temporarily establish its

¹⁷ **Abdullah** 2001, 13.

¹⁸ **Abdullah** 2001.

¹⁹ **Abdullah** 2001, 10.

²⁰ **Abdullah** 2001.

²¹ **Longrigg** 1960, 1085–1087.

power in the ungovernable province of Basra. Five years later, Basra was officially subjected to Baghdad pashalik, who relied on the Mamluks to rule the country.²²

Nevertheless, despite the unfavorable political conditions, the terrible frequent epidemics of plague and unhealthy climate in the XVIII century, Iraq in general and Basra in particular, continued to be one of the most important ports of the Indian Ocean.²³

As mentioned above, some of the New Julfan Armenians, who later moved on to Iraq formed a very wealthy trade community, competing with financially and politically influential Jewish merchants. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Jewish presence in Iraq goes back to pre-Islamic times, but they did not form an important community in the southern part of the country until the Umayyad period of the late VII century.

Over time, the Jews became heavily involved in the riverine trade with Baghdad, whereas the Armenian merchants were busy in the caravan trade with their compatriots and others in Aleppo.²⁴

The fortunes of the Jewish community generally mirrored those of Basra's inhabitants, flourishing during the Abbasid period and declining after the Mongol invasion in 1258. They were singled out for persecution by Timur Lang, who invaded Iraq in 1393 and destroyed all the country's synagogues. However, despite their continued presence, the Jewish community did not regain its importance until the XVIII century when, according to the local tradition, a new migration of Jews from Baghdad increased their numbers and prestige. They must have also benefited from the generally favorable treatment that Jews received in the Ottoman Empire as a whole.²⁵

The difference of wealth of the Armenian and Jewish communities was not evident early in the XVIII century. The Armenians were, by far, the wealthiest and most influential of the "dhimmi" communities in Mesopotamia – Iraq. The foreign travelers hardly mentioned the Jewish community in Basra in the said century, yet they repeatedly emphasized the significance of the Armenians.²⁶

²² Longrigg 1925, 123–276.

²³ Ohanian 2013, 94.

²⁴ Ohanian 2013.

²⁵ Abdullah 2001, 94.

²⁶ Niebuhr 1780, 180.

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Under the protection and benevolent treatment of the Safavids, the Armenians succeeded in expanding their commercial activities throughout Asia, including Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. In fact, most historians agree that Armenian merchants came to monopolize Persia's foreign trade under the Safavids, having agents as far afield as Sweden and China and the whole Far East.²⁷ However, by the second decade of the XVIII century, the Safavid Empire was in its last stages of collapse. After the fall of their benefactors, the Safavids, and the decline of Isfahan in 1722, the Armenians lost the patronage of the major power.²⁸ Nevertheless, thanks to their unmatched sense of communal solidarity, they still managed to persist as one of the important trading communities throughout the XVIII century.²⁹

During the XVII and early XVIII centuries, Armenian merchants' participation in Ottoman-Safavid commerce centered mainly on their control of the Persian silk trade.³⁰ At Basra, the Armenian merchants were also active in the Indian trade. The Indian historian Ashin Das Gupta confirms that the Armenian merchants of Surat were in the forefront of the trade to Basra and the Gulf. Armenian-owned vessels, such as **"Padroni"**, **"Santa Cruze"**, **"St. Michael"**, **"Hopewell"**, etc. operated regularly between India and Basra.³¹ In 1729 the English agent in Basra reported that the Armenians were behind the importation of much of the piece goods from Bengal. However, by the middle of the century, the gradual influence of the English presence in Iraq and India changed the situation as they sailed from Basra to Surat in 1763, including six separate shipments of pearls, five of which belonged to Armenian merchants.³² There were also numerous accounts, throughout the century of Armenian merchants travelling between Basra and India on English ships without clear reference to their cargo.³³

It should be noted that at the end of the XVI century and beginning of XVII century, the sea route across the Persian Gulf became vital in the economic life of Safavid Iran, as it had great advantages over the land caravan routes of Turkey. The trading companies of European states bought Iranian raw silk mainly from

²⁷ Issawi 1971, 12.

²⁸ Bournoutian 2004, 87.

²⁹ Abdullah 2001, 95.

³⁰ Grigorian 1974, 670; Frangakis-Syrett 107–108.

³¹ Melkonian 1957, 64; Ashin Das Gupta 1994, 136.

³² Abdullah 2001, 96.

³³ Ashin Das Gupta 1994, 136.

Iranian-Armenian middlemen in Turkish cities.³⁴ Moreover, studying the definition of capitulation regime in Iran, M. Panahyan rightly states that in the XVII century, the Armenian merchants of Julfa played an exceptionally important role in organizing the struggle against the expansion of Western European colonists in Iran, and decisively opposed the capitulation regime in Iran.³⁵ In fact, Armenians, parallel to their commercial activities, participated in diplomatic work as well. This is why in Iran-Europe negotiations Shah Abbas I started benefiting from the services of the Armenian envoys. It is well known that in 1597, as diplomatic commissioner of Shah Abbas I, the envoy of Edjmiatzin – Hakob Margaryan of Amid, headed for Europe. In 1603, there were three Armenian merchants from New Julfa in the Persian expedition sent by Shah Abbas. In this regard, Khoja Zakar Sahratyan testifies to what authority the Armenian khojas had in foreign diplomacy. The “Diamond Throne” gifted to Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, had 897 diamonds, 1298 rubies, 18030 of turquoise.³⁶ Among other issues, the ambassador of Venice Vincenzo d’Alexander, Joseph Pitton de Tournefort and other travelers also referred to the conduct of the Armenian merchants. Thus, during the period in question, the Armenians played a significant role in organizing and implementing the trade in the countries of the Middle East, taking part in various spheres of public life.

The Armenian merchants of Mesopotamia/Iraq also had strong commercial ties with their compatriots in Aleppo. This city which represented an important junction on the East-West trade routes, attracted Armenian merchants, who had high positions in international trade and economic relations. Many artisan and labor groups from various Armenian settlements were also concentrated in this city.

The Armenian presence in Aleppo is an indisputable fact, as this city was the resting place for the Armenian pilgrims heading towards the Holy Land – Jerusalem. In addition, along with the development of trade relations between the Kingdom of Cilicia and the commercial centers of historical Syria, many Armenians began to settle in Aleppo.³⁷ After the collapse of the Armenian state of Cilicia in 1375, the Mamluks took 4000 Armenian captives with them, some of

³⁴ Bayburdyan 1966, 215, 219.

³⁵ Baybudryan 1966, 220.

³⁶ Baghdasaryan 2015, 103.

³⁷ Alpoyajian 1967, 457.

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whom settled in Aleppo.³⁸ Most of the latter were artisans and merchants who settled in Aleppo, as this city was comparatively more peaceful and favorable for future commercial activity.³⁹

After the collapse of the Armenian state of Cilicia and the departure of the Genoa merchants of the Black Sea, Aleppo developed very quickly as an intermediary city carrying out the east-west trade movement. At that time, huge suburbs were formed along the caravan roads and Christians, Maronites, and especially Armenians settled in one of these suburbs. The latter acted as mediators and translators for European buyers.⁴⁰ The Christian communities of Aleppo, including the Orthodox Maronites and Assyrians, were centered in Saliba and Judaïda.

In the following centuries, the Armenian settlement of Aleppo was replenished with Armenian emigrants from Armenia and other communities. Their temporary or permanent stay in Aleppo, Antioch and elsewhere, where numerous historical handwritten manuscripts were found⁴¹ is accounted for by the political situation and/or trade-economic ties.

It is noteworthy that in Aleppo in 1518 there were 249 Armenian families (1245 persons), whereas in 1526 there were 1415 Armenians.⁴²

The first mention of Julfan merchants at the city-port of Aleppo dates from the last quarter of the XV century. By the 1550s the local Armenian community counted in its ranks a significant number of prominent merchants from Julfa, who, as wealthy magnates, occupied an important position in Aleppo's international trade. In the XVII and XVIII centuries, the Julfan merchants represented the most influential community in Aleppo. Most of their wealth came from the profitable silk trade with Persia. As this trade declined during the XVIII century, the Armenian merchants shifted most of their capital to the caravan trade with Basra, which linked Aleppo to India. In this regard, a French report about the trade of Basra, confirms that the Armenians played a dominant role in the caravan trade with Aleppo. The wealth of the resident Julfan merchants brought about many changes in this city's Armenian community. Supported by the silk

³⁸ **Sanjian** 1965, 18.

³⁹ **Surmeyian** 1946, 420.

⁴⁰ **Makaryan** 2018, 271.

⁴¹ **Fishenkjian** 2018, 10.

⁴² **Semerdjian** 2019, 38.

merchants, new churches were constructed and illuminated manuscripts commissioned.⁴³

During the XV–XVII centuries, the Armenian communities of historical Syria developed significantly due to active flourishing international trade. The main route of transit trade between the East and the West was the Tabriz-Aleppo route.⁴⁴ This was due to the capture of Constantinople by Turks. The European and Asian merchants were in direct contact in Aleppo. Close relations existed with Venice and other Italian city-states. The Armenian Khojas (merchants) transported Persian and Syrian silk to Europe.⁴⁵

During his travels in 1616–1617, Simon the Pole arrived in Aleppo and spoke with admiration about the Armenian merchants, their grandeur buildings, unlimited wealth and influential position. The commercial significance and monetary operations of Aleppo were so great that they were forced to keep a private royal treasury in the fortress of Aleppo, where small silver and copper coins were minted.⁴⁶ In his valuable research, Archbishop Surmeyian mentions names of Christian superintendants, among them he also mentions the name of Armenian Murad Sarkis – son of Father Sarkis (1630–1660).

Armenian communities were also active in Damascus and other cities. In fact, the development of Aleppo silk market in the XVI century had its presedent, when Armenian merchants imported Persian silk in the XV century to export it to the West, the international trade of raw silk was a monopoly of the Armenian traders of Aleppo of that period, especially the merchants of Julfa, largely using the Eastern caravan road on the market.⁴⁷

According to Aleppo-Armenian archeologist Nubar Partamian, on May 13, 1965, 20 armenian inscriptions were discovered at a place 80 km to the south of Der Zor, which were believed to belong to Julfan Armenians.⁴⁸

There was a new flow of Armenians to Aleppo in the XVI century when after the destruction of Old Julfa, Aleppo became as reliable a refuge for most of the Julfans as it was for the people of Cilicia. Among the merchants of Aleppo, the

⁴³ **Aslanian** 2011, 67.

⁴⁴ **Papazian** <https://arar.sci.am/dlibra/publication/40947/edition/36691?language=en>. P. 67. (25.08.2024).

⁴⁵ **Topouzyan** 1986, 33–34.

⁴⁶ **Surmeyian** 1946, 530–532.

⁴⁷ **Hasratian, Ortzekova S.F., Petrossian Hu.A.** 1986, 75.

⁴⁸ **Partamian** 1975, 370.

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Armenian merchants of Julfa who in a short period took over the management of the church and national affairs of the Armenian community, occupied high positions.⁴⁹

By dominating the economy of Aleppo, the Armenians concentrated mostly on the silk trade and occupied the main Ottoman and Armenian institutions of the city. However, the large influx of Armenians from the cities of Akn and Arabkir in Western Armenia reduced the role of merchants from Julfa in the said trade.⁵⁰

It is to be mentioned that in the XVII–XVIII centuries, alongside the large Arab population in Aleppo, Turks, Persians, Jews, as well as Armenians, Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch and other Western-European traders, clergy, diplomats and others also made up a significant number of the residents.

Apart from the above, in the XVI century, the authority of the Catholic Church in Europe was greatly weakened by the emergence of Protestantism. A large number of Catholics had left the Roman authority en masse, tens of thousands of Catholic clergy were left without a priest and pastor. The Church of Rome had long tried to strengthen its position by uniting with the Churches of the East.⁵¹

The Holy See of Rome noticed that after Constantinople, Aleppo was the most important and populous Christian city, where European merchants had a wide base and could serve the newly formed Unitarian movement. Therefore, in the mid-XVI century, the Catholic congregations in Aleppo, in cooperation with their corresponding representatives, established primary schools for the local Greek, Assyrian and Maronites youth.

To satisfy the spiritual needs of the Armenian community in Aleppo, the church of the Holy Mother of God was built. Until the end of the XV century and with the increase of the number of Armenians, a new church – Srbot's Karasnit's Mankants – was built.⁵²

In the XVII–XVIII centuries amongst dense Arab population of Aleppo, a significant number of Turks, Persians, Jews and Armenians also lived beside Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch and other West-European merchants, clergy, diplomats and others.

⁴⁹ **Surmeyian** 1946, 420–421.

⁵⁰ **Makaryan** 2023, 139.

⁵¹ **Surmeyian** 1946, 70–72.

⁵² **Surmeyian** 1935, 214.

After Cairo and Constantinople, Aleppo was the richest and biggest city of the Ottoman Empire until the XIX century after which it gave way to Beirut.⁵³

Among the notable Armenians of Aleppo, Haji Kirakos and his sons exported the fine silk of Antioch and the surrounding villages to Europe, especially Holland and Italy.⁵⁴ Khoja Petik with his brother, who was originally from Old Julfa, monopolized the silk trade in the city. In addition to being the richest merchant in Aleppo, Petik also occupied the post of the customs director of all Ottoman Syria. He and his brother, like many wealthy Julfans were important patrons of the Armenian community. The two brothers, donated funds for the construction of the second Armenian church in Aleppo in 1616.⁵⁵ They used to travel around the city with their personal retinue of forty guards like a local pasha.⁵⁶

Thus, the famous Armenian merchants, who were known as “Khojas” (Khoja meant lord, ruler and was used for the Armenian merchants in Persia) represented the notables of the community. The most prominent of them, reaching a certain position, assumed the title of “Chelepi” and enjoyed great fame and prestige both within the Armenian community and in the government circles.⁵⁷

However, in the XVI–XVIII centuries, large and vibrant cities of historical Syria (or Bilad El-Sham) faced the challenges of widespread ignorance within the Ottoman empire. The Armenian merchants financed the projects which provided education and knowledge, as well as application of certain fields of art within their community. It is noteworthy that Armenian merchants were the patrons of the art of writing and literature, as well as certain crafts and arts.

Thus, it can be stated that mastering of trade administration and its management by Armenian merchants in the above countries, contributed significantly to the increase of their role in the countries of the region and their active participation in public life.

Conclusion

It is a well-known fact that since ancient times, Armenians have traded with

⁵³ Hilal 2006, 17.

⁵⁴ Surmelyan 1946, 272.

⁵⁵ Sanjian 1965, 49.

⁵⁶ Aslanian 69, Sanjian 49.

⁵⁷ Makaryan 2023, 140.

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neighboring countries and participated in international trade. It is obvious that in such relations, such involvement requires a certain delicate behavior, knowledge, psychology, deep respect for the traditions and customs of the peoples. Thus, engaging in trade became a requirement at that time in absence of statehood in the late Middle Ages and modern times.

After the fall of the Bagratids' dynasty in 1045, and the fall of Zaqarians' reign in addition to the conquest of the Cilician Kingdom in 1375, the circumstances led to the rise of a long period of dictatorships in the Middle East, that forced a significant part of the Armenian people to emigrate.

In the new and difficult conditions, the Armenians in the neighboring regions outside the borders of the former homeland, although in the status of emigrants, but were already experienced and knowledgeable traders. They began to show their best qualities in the field of administration. Basically, in some sense, it also became a guarantee of their physical existence. Furthermore, trade became an Armenian network that united the East and the West. It was through trade that Armenians were able to become real mediators, diplomatic envoys, solvers of some issues between different states. In fact, trade became the exclusive sphere where Armenians were given the opportunity to fully act and create, as there was no violence against them.

The broad structural transformation that took place during the subject era included all of Asia and the Indian Ocean countries. The way in which merchants of New Julfa, Basra and Aleppo organized their trading operations were directly related to the nature of these cities' networks and the instability of the stated period. The most common method of organization and management of their trade activities was through family or communal connections. The Armenian merchants concentrated on Basra, Aleppo and Indian trade.

In the XVIII century Armenian merchants came to monopolize Iran's foreign trade under the Safavids. Although with the decline of Isfahan and the fall of the Safavids in 1722, the Armenians lost the patronage of the major power in the region, nevertheless, due to their unmatched sense of communal solidarity, they still managed to persist as one of the important trading communities of the region throughout the XVII–XVIII centuries.

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**ՀԱՅ ՎԱՃԱՌԱԿԱՆՆԵՐՈՒ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ
ՄԵՐՁԱԽՈՐ ԱՐԵՒԵԼՔԻ ՏՆՏԵՍՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԶԱՐԳԱՑՄԱՆ
XVII–XIX ԴԴ.**

**ՍԵՂԱ ՕՀԱՆԵԱՆ, ԿԱՐԵՆ ՄԿՐՏՉՅԱՆ, ԱՆԻ ՖԻՇԵՆԿՅԱՆ
Ամփոփում**

Յօդուածը նուիրուած է XVII–XIX դդ. հայ վաճառականներու մասնակցութեամբ Մերձախոր Արեւելքի տնտեսութեան զարգացման վերլուծութեան, որպէս տարածաշրջանի սոցիալական բացառիկ իրողութիւն, որ կարելի է դիտարկել նաեւ մէկ կողմէ որպէս, իսկ միւս կողմէ տեղական իսլամադաւան եւ քրիստոնէադաւան տարբեր կրօնական համայնքներու միջեւ խաղաղ գոյակցութեան արտայայտութիւն:

Ըստ այդմ, ժամանակագրական տեսանկիւնէն հետազօտութեան մէջ ներկայացուած է XVII–XIX դդ., երբ Մերձախոր Արեւելքի մէջ կը հատուէին կամ կը բախուէին Մեծ տէրութիւններու միջեւ շահերը: Սակայն այդ դժուարին յարաբերութիւններու պայմաններուն որոշակի գործունէութիւն ծաւալած են հայ վաճառականները՝ իրար կապելով Արեւելքն ու Արեւմուտքը, այդպիսով իսկական կամուրջ հանդիսանալով Մերձախոր Արեւելքի եւ եւրոպական հասարակութիւններու միջեւ:

Այս կարելի է բացատրել անով, որ Մերձախոր Արեւելքի հայկական գաղթօճախները թէեւ փոքր ընդհատումներով կամ ժամանակ առ ժամանակ սկսան վերելք ապրիլ սուրիական, իրանական կամ իրաքեան հասարակութիւններու սոցիալական կառուցուածքի մէջ: Կարելի է վստահաբար ըսել, որ առեւտրի մէջ յաջողակ ըլլալը նպաստած է հայկական գաղթավայրերու մէջ ազգային առանձնայատկութիւններու եւ նկարագիրի պահպանման:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Հայ վաճառականներ, Իրաք, Իրան, Հալէպ, Կարաւան, առևտրային ուղիներ, Պարսից Ծոց:

РОЛЬ АРМЯНСКОГО КУПЕЧЕСТВА В РАЗВИТИИ БЛИЖНЕВОСТОЧНОЙ ЭКОНОМИКИ XVII–XIX ВВ.

СЕДА ОГАНЯН, КАРЕН МКРТЧЯН, АНИ ФИШЕНКЧЯН

Резюме

В статье анализируется роль армянского купечества в развитии экономики Ближнего Востока XVII–XIX вв. как исключительного социально-общественного явления регионального значения, которое можно интерпретировать и как проявление мирного сосуществования армян с местными исламскими и христианскими общинами.

В исследуемый нами период с XVII по XIX вв. на Ближнем Востоке пересекались либо сталкивались интересы мировых держав. Но даже в условиях непростых взаимоотношений армянскому купечеству все же удавалось осуществлять свою деятельность, прокладывая мосты между Ближним Востоком и Европой.

Это можно объяснить тем фактом, что в жизни ближневосточных армянских общин, хотя и с незначительными перерывами, наблюдался процесс прогрессивного развития сирийской, иранской или иракской социальных структур.

Можно с уверенностью утверждать, что фактор успешности в торговых отношениях во многом способствовал сохранению характерных особенностей и национального облика армянских общин.

Ключевые слова: *армянское купечество, Ирак, Иран, Алеппо, караван, торговые пути, Персидский залив.*