

## **Trade Routes, Trading Centers and the Emergence of the Domestic Market in Azerbaijan in the Period of Arab-Khazar Domination on the Silk Road**

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Bloody wars between Arab Muslims and Khazar Turks in the Caucasus continued for a more than a hundred years from the mid 7<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. The Khazar state survived but had to withdraw from Caucasian Albania, the present territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, the Khazars managed to expand their political control over the trade routes north-east and north-west of the Caucasian ridge. A trade partnership was established between former rival powers in the region that allows us to call the period after the end of the Arab-Khazar wars up to the time of the collapse of the Khazar state in the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century an era of Arab-Khazar partnership and domination of the Silk Road. This article highlights the impact made by geopolitical shifts in the regions of the time upon international trade tracks and particularly on the development of trade facilities, infrastructure, and local production in Azerbaijan, which became a major transit country of goods from the north to markets in the Muslim Near East.

**Keywords:** Khazars, Arab-Khazar wars, ancient trade routes, Silk Road, Azerbaijan.

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## **On the Eve of the Arab Expansion**

At the end of the 6th century CE, Byzantium was the main consumer of Chinese silk. By this time, Sasanid Iran had already established its own production of raw silk and silk fabrics. The Chinese monopoly had been lost long ago, since from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, local silk production already existed in the Sogdian city Merv (Klyashtorny and Sultanov 2009, 117; Mamleeva 1999). In addition, in the reign of Emperor Justin II (565-578), a Persian merchant even brought silkworms to Byzantium inside his cambok despite the strict prohibition (Vizantiyets 1860, 493). However, silk production, which began in Syria and Egypt, still used raw materials imported from East Turkestan and Central Asia (Klyashtorny and Sultanov 2009, 117). Arab geographers of the tenth century Al-Istahri and Ibn Haukal reported that the Caspian region of Jurjan produced raw silk and silk fabrics in big quantities, which were exported to all countries of the world (al-Istakhri 1967, 213-214; Ibn Haukal 1967, 382). Apparently, the production of silk in Iran was established no later than the rule of the Sassanian king Khosrov Anushirvan (531-579).

From the time of the Huns on the Eurasian steppes (2nd century BC - 2nd century AD), much of the Chinese silk was concentrated in the hands of the nomadic nobility. Silk served as a means of payment to ensure peace on the northern borders of the Celestial Empire. It was bought from the Chinese as a result of unequal exchange for goods of nomadic production — small cattle, pack animals, leather, etc. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, similar relations developed between the Turkic Kaganate and China. The two ruling dynasties of China adjacent to the Turks, the Northern Zhou and the Northern Qi, paid the Turks in the form of an unequal border exchange each of 100,000 pieces of silk annually (Vaissière 2014, 117).

## **Alliance of Nomads and Merchants**

Normally, the nomads themselves could not leave their livestock and households for a long time to wander around the markets of the empires of the West and the East. On the other hand, intermediate trade centers on the Silk Road routes, at which merchants exchanged goods, necessitated the existence of international networks of trusted trading partners, which were often established as trade guilds or corporations. These centers and trade people were protected by nomads who were interested in the smooth operation of retail chains because it was with their help that wealth concentrated in the nomadic nobility was delivered to customers in distant countries and finally brought huge profits to both the original owners of the goods and middleman merchants. This was the way the union of merchants and the nomadic nobility was formed.

In the Turkic Kaganate, such relations existed between the ruling dynasty of Ashina and

the Sogdian trading corporations. Sogdians were interested in selling locally produced silk fabrics. Their interests coincided with the Turks, who had accumulated a lot of Chinese silk (Kovalev 2005, 60). The Sogdian merchant Maniah was authorized by Istemi-khan, the ruler of the Western Kaganate (552-576), to negotiate with Iran and Byzantium. He was sent with the first batch of goods to Iran (566 CE). The Sassanian shahinshah Khosrov Anushirvan paid for the silk, but right there in front of the Turkish ambassadors ordered the burning of the consignment of goods brought by Maniah. Iran did not need silk and did not want to let foreign merchants come to the country for security reasons. The mission to Byzantium the following year was more successful. Byzantines and Turks were brought together thanks to their economic interests and political controversies with Iran. A trade agreement was also enshrined by a military alliance against Iran (Menander 1860, 373, 379).

### **Trade Highways on the Eve of the Arab Conquest**

During the period of the Turkic-Byzantine entente, the importance of the Caucasian routes and the Caucasian peoples who lived on this road increased many times. The story by Menander (1860) about the exchange of diplomatic missions between the Byzantines and the Turks allows us to make a conclusion that the trade routes through the Caucasus on the eve of the appearance of the Arabs were controlled by the Turkic kaganate. In the Arabic sources, we find an indirect but convincing confirmation of the described situation of the functioning of the Caucasian routes from Khorezm to Byzantium. The historian al-Balazuri reports on the measures taken by Khosrov Anushirvan to strengthen the northern borders, and in this context notes that among the cities built by Anushirvan in the Caucasus was the city of Sugdabil, where the shahinshah settled Sogdians. Sogdians were merchants in the service of the Turks. The story of the Sogdian-Turkic embassy of Maniah testifies that Anushirvan could not allow Sogdians to settle on his borders as he did not confide in Sogdian merchants to enter Iran. Most likely, the Arab historian wanted to suggest that at the time of Khosrov Anushirvan, there appeared a Sogdian trade colony in the Caucasus. Only the Turks could patronize the Sogdian merchants, and their trade routes led to Byzantium.

In 603, the Turkic Khaganate finally split into western and eastern parts. The Western Turkic Kaganate, which continued to cooperate with Byzantium in organizing international trade, was also a reliable ally for her in a military confrontation with Iran. This alliance manifested itself most vividly during the Iran-Byzantine war in the Caucasus in 625-627, which L. N. Gumilev called the "World War of the VII Century" (Gumilev 1993, 193). In military operations, the main forces of the Kaganate were Caucasian Turks, who were beginning to consolidate into a new political force which became known as the Khazars. The Western-Turkic Kaganate fell in the middle of the 7th century as a result of internal

strife, hostility with the Eastern Kaganate, and the expansion of Tang China. The Western Caucasian Turks, the Khazars, were able to create their own state entity, which for the next three centuries successfully competed with the main powers of the region in the struggle for control over the western sector of the Eurasian Silk Road routes.

### **The Struggle of the Arabs and the Khazars for Control over the Caucasian Trade Routes**

The formation of the Khazar state coincided with the appearance of the Arab Caliphate on the world political arena, which after the crushing defeat of the Sassanian army in the battle of Nehavend in 642, began to push its borders to the north and east. During the 8th century, stubborn fighting took place with Central Asian Turks, and after the collapse of the Western Turkic Kaganate, successive Türgesh tribal leaders supported Sogdian trade cities in resisting Arab expansion (Bartold 1963c, 121, 163-164, 229-230).

In the north, the advance of the Arabs through the South Caucasus was confronted with fierce and much better organized resistance by the Khazars. Violent confrontation from the beginning of the collision until the end of the 8th century led to a military-political balance and peace. Former rivals and enemies became good partners in the lucrative international trade on the Silk Road. Stability and significant income from trade turned Khazaria into a powerful state that for nearly three centuries kept the northern borders of Byzantium and the Caliphate shut, preventing nomads from raiding the lands of their southern neighbors. The three superpowers for some time delimited their spheres of influence in Eurasia and the Middle East.

### **Magisterial Routes through the Caucasus and Azerbaijan in the Era of Arab Domination**

In the western sector of the Eurasian trade routes, the powerful Khazaria now became a desired partner because it ensured the safe passage of caravans through the lands under its control inhabited by various peoples. Harun ar-Rashid concluded “peace and union” with the Khazars (Buniyatov 1965, 115). Sources make it possible to judge that during this period the Khazars managed to create and lead trade and political alliances that ensured the passage of goods in two main directions, that is, above all, the path from Khorezm through the middle and lower reaches of the Volga to the Dnieper and further to Western Europe. The initial sections of this road were founded in the middle of the 6th century by Sogdian merchants. However, it was necessary to bypass Byzantium and deliver goods to Western Europe. Thus, the northern route already had two main branches, one leading to Byzantium through the

Khazar possessions in the Caucasus and the Crimea, and the other through Eastern Europe to the Frankish state.

The second main trade route provided by Khazaria was a way to access the markets of the Caliphate for the goods of Khazaria itself and other northern peoples. It was a path south through the South Caucasus. Middle Eastern goods were delivered in the opposite direction and, above all, there was a silver Abbasid coin which was in great demand among the northern peoples who did not have their own coinage but were forced to pay taxes to the Khazars partially in monetary terms (Kovalev 2005, 80). This was not a completely new direction of movement of merchants and goods, but in the late Sassanian time, this path practically did not function due to the hostile relations of the Western Turkic Kaganate and Iran. Reliable evidence of the early existence of this trade route was left to us by Strabo. He reported that the nomadic Aorsi people maintained caravan trade with the Middle East and India in partnership with the Median and Armenian merchants. The Aorsi controlled most of the western coast of the Caspian Sea and received large profits from this trade (Strabo 1964, 480). The data of Strabo, which in accordance with other sources and archaeological arguments can be dated to the 1st-2nd centuries CE, can be compared with the information of the 4th century BC on trade with the capital of the Medes maintained by the other Caspian people, the Caspians, who lived at the mouth of the Kura River and farther south (Gadzhiev 2009, 28-29).

## **The Caspian Gate**

There were two main routes to the south. One was the so-called Darial Pass, which was also known as the Alan Gate. As the name suggests, this passage was located in the territory of the Iranian-speaking people the Alans, who are considered the ancestors of modern Ossetians. There was also the famous Derbent passage along the western coast of the Caspian Sea. Strengthening of these passages was always among the most important issues in the relationship between the great powers, and apparently the issue was discussed between Iran and Rome as early as the reign of Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395). The first fortification works were carried out by the Sassanids in the reign of Shahinshah Yezdigerd II (438-451) (Minorsky and Munajjim Bashi 1958, 87, n. 2). Both passages were called the Caspian Gates, although the term more often referred to the Derbent Pass. This, of course, was justified, first of all, for reasons of a geographic nature, since the Derbent barrier wall went to one end to the Caspian Sea. On the other hand, naming the Darial Pass the Caspian Gates could not simply be a mistake, or a confusion arising from ancient authors in connection with an inability to distinguish them from the Derbent Pass. There is an opinion that the Darial Pass got the name of the Caspian Gates in the era of antiquity. In particular,

Josephus and Cornelius Tacitus called it the Caspian Gate on behalf of the Caspian people, whose settlement zone stretched from the shores of the Caspian Sea to the central part of the north Caucasus Mountains, and shrank to the coastal regions of the southern Caspian region only in the early Middle Ages (Melikov 2009, 71).

The well-known Russian Dagestani historian A. K. Alikberov expressed the opinion that the fortification erected to the south of the Derbent walls under the predecessors of Khosrov Anushirvan, the so-called Arran walls, stretched from the western Caspian coast to the Alan (Arran) Gates. Later, information about these gates, and accordingly about their localization in the Caspian Sea, was transferred to the mountain pass in the Central Caucasus thanks to the consonance of the term with the name of the Alan people (Alikberov 2003, 83-84).

The path to the south from the zone of the Eurasian Steppe was of particular importance for the two major trade operations, first, for the transit of Chinese-made goods as an alternative route from China to Iran through Central Asia, and second, to deliver goods from the Caucasus and countries north of the Caucasus Mountains included in the zone of political influence of the Khazars in the 8th-10th centuries to Middle Eastern markets.

### **From War to Peace: Arab-Khazar Trade Partnership**

The interests of international trade were a powerful factor in building relations between nomads and sedentary peoples. The desire to control trade routes served as a stimulus for the creation of large nomadic empires with the aim of submission of and, at the same time, integration with settled agricultural communities (Kradin 2000, 329). The nomadic empires were an important condition for the functioning of trade routes, since they guaranteed the safety of goods and the safety of merchants who undertook trade enterprises for long months through the steppe expanses inhabited by militant peoples. The development of the Khazar tribal confederation followed the same path.

For three centuries from the middle of the 7th century, the Khazar Khaganate controlled the most important junctions of the Silk Road highways and was probably the most successful in gaining profits from international trade as a transit country with vast areas under its control. In addition, the Khazar state succeeded in collecting products manufactured by its tributaries, including the Eastern Slavic peoples. The Khazars were opposed by the two most powerful states of that time - Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate. The advancement of the Vikings/Scandinavians to Eastern Europe and the establishment of political entities with the subordinate Slavic population by them was a new factor that complicated the confrontation in the region. The subordination of this factor was the most important element of the foreign policy of the main player states in the region. The Khazar king wrote in his letter to

the high dignitary of the Cordoba Caliph Abd ar-Rahman III (929-961), the Jew Hasdai ibn Shaprut, that he lived on the bank of a river where it met the Caspian Sea and would not allow the Varangians arriving on ships to raid Muslim possessions, or allow other enemies of Muslims either by sea or by land (Kokovtsov 1932, 83-84). There is every reason to believe that a peace was established between the Khazars and the Arabs after a century and a half of open confrontation, according to the conditions of which the Khazar state controlled the militias of the Vikings, as well as the Turkic nomads on the western and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea, and protected the territory of the Muslim possessions from their raids.

### **Rus Merchants on the Transcaucasian and Trans-Caspian Trade Routes**

The city-fortress Sarkel was a symbol of the power of the Khazars, as well as a stronghold of the military, overseeing the safety of trade routes and the collection of trade duties in the north-west of the state. Its construction took place with the assistance of Byzantium and begun in the interval between 834-837, which is confirmed by Byzantine sources. Russian archaeologist and historian M. I. Artamonov, who can rightly be called the founder of modern Soviet-Russian Khazar studies, rather convincingly localized Sarkel on the left bank of the Don River near the village of Tsimlyanskaya. Artamonov managed to carry out archaeological excavations and discover impressive material facts of the so-called Saltovo-Mayatsk culture of the Khazar time (Artamonov 1962, 298-301) before the waters of the Tsimlyansk reservoir hid Sarkel under its surface in 1953.

In Sarkel, different directions of trade routes controlled by Khazaria converged and diverged. The northern transportation path of Middle Eastern goods and silver dirhams were mentioned above. Details of this route to Scandinavia and to Western Europe can be found in the *Tale of Bygone Years* by Nestor the Russian chronicler of the end of the 11th century. It also provides a brief description of the journey in the opposite direction – from the Varangians to the Greeks – and also along the Volga east to the place where it entered the Caspian (Khvaliss) Sea – the route “to the Bulgars and to Khvaliss” (Nestor 1991, 144-45). The naming of the eastern route “to the Bulgars and Khvaliss” convincingly shows that the author of the Russian chronicle was referring to the trade route through the Volga and the northern Caspian region to Khorezm, served by Muslim (khvaliss) merchants. The author is also aware of the Volga Bulgaria (Bulgaria), along with the Bulgars in the Balkans, and the role of the Bulgar merchants and Bulgar as the most important trading center on the way from Central Asia to Eastern Europe. The activity of this track refers to the late Khazar time, to the second half of the tenth century – the time when Samanids and Bulgar merchants created their trade union and succeeded in the direction of the flow of goods along the

routes controlled by them. Apparently, this is the main reason for the absolute predominance of Samanid coins in European hoards dating from the 10th century (Kovalev 2001, 245). This could occur due to the weakening of the power of the Khazar Kaganate and, of course, with the assistance of the central government in the Caliphate, which dismissed the ability of the Khazar Khaganate to ensure the security of trade routes as before during the 9th century. The departure of the mission of Ahmad ibn Fadlan to the Bulgars, who had converted to the Muslim faith in 921-22, through Central Asia and the lands of the Oghuz Turks, bypassing the areas directly under the authority of the Khazar Khagan, indicates the participation of the Caliphate authorities in the preparation of these changes in trade routes (Zakhoder 1962, 57). There were several reasons for this. We point out the two most important of them. The Khazar ruling elite adopted Judaism, and despite the growing Muslim and Christian population in Khazaria, it became increasingly hostile towards the gentiles. The same Ibn Fadlan testified that in the capital of the Khazars there was a cathedral mosque. However, the Khazar king ordered the minaret of the Khazar mosque to be dismantled in retaliation for the destruction of the synagogue in the Muslim domains (Togan 1939, 45; Kovalevsky 1956, 148). The second important reason was the inability of the Khazar Khaganate to contain the predatory campaigns of the Rus against the Muslim regions south of Derbent in the 10th century, which they had successfully managed throughout the 9th century (Bartold, 1963a).

### **Silk Road Routes in Azerbaijan**

Two prominent Arab authors left notable information on the maritime trade routes across the Caspian. Ibn Hordadbeh's work was created in the middle of the 11th century. A whole century separates a geographical work by al-Masudi from the work of Ibn Hordadbeh.

Ibn Hordadbeh in a story about the northern trade points particularly to the Rus merchants, whom he calls a nation of "Saqlabs"<sup>1</sup> and reports that they traded in furs and swords, which they carried from the remote lands of the Saqlab country to the "Rum" Sea (or Black Sea). There they paid a fee to the Byzantines. They continued to carry the goods up the Don River to the Khazar city of Hamlij,<sup>2</sup> where they paid tithes to the Khazar king and followed the Volga River to the Caspian Sea. They crossed the sea towards the southern coast. Here, they could unload goods on shore and carry them on camel backs to

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<sup>1</sup> An ethnic term used in Arabic sources to refer to various peoples to the north of the Caucasus Mountains. Most often it meant Slavs, since the word itself is considered to be derived from "sklavin" (Slav). However, quite often the term denoted northern peoples of unknown origin, or it could be interpreted as a racial designation. In some reports, Finno-Ugric and Turkic people could also be meant by the term. Ibn Fadlan, for example, calls the Volga Bulgars Saqlabs.

<sup>2</sup> No mutually agreed opinion exists in academic literature concerning the correct reading and localization of this toponym. The prevailing point of view is that the word is a distortion of the Turkic Khanbalik - the city of Khagan (Khan). A part of the Khazar capital at the mouth of the Volga River might be known by this word.



Baghdad (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 154). Ibn Hordadbeh's story about trans-Caspian Rus trade is supplemented with such important details as an indication of the direct non-stop transportation of goods from ports in the south Caspian Gorgan province to the Khazar capital of Itil in 8 days with a fair wind (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 124).

The famous geographer and historian al-Masudi himself sailed along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea and asked if the Caspian Sea was connected to the Sea of Azov. The thoughtful intellectual was pushed to make such an assumption by the news of the military operations of the Rus in the Black Sea and on the other side of Europe – off the coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Nobody confirmed the existence of a connection, but the people pointed to the mouth of the Volga, from which the Rus started to come in the 10th century, horrifying the coastal Muslim lands (al-Masudi 2005, 95). The Rus military operations changed their peaceful trade relations with the local population of the Caspian oblasts in the early 10th century. This was noted by al-Masoudi, in contrast to Ibn Hordadbeh, who reported only on Scandinavian trade operations in the Caspian Sea.<sup>3</sup>

The Khazar capital Itil on the estuary of the Volga was the largest trading center, where various merchant guilds – Rus, Jewish merchants, Muslims: Arabs, Persians, Khorezmians – and, finally, the Khazars themselves held permanent trade points. The merchant class was held in high esteem by the Khazars. Even members of the Khagan family were engaged in trade in Itil. Al-Istakhri reports that a member of the Khagan family engaged in the bread trade was one of the most worthy candidates for the Khagan throne, but he was not considered a candidate only because he was a Muslim (Al-Istakhri 1961, 131). From Itil, the path of trade caravans to the south forked out. The Rus transported goods by sea and, apparently, sought to pull the flow of goods in this direction. They were certainly interested in intercepting goods transported to Itil by various routes, including along the tributaries of the Volga.

From Itil, goods could follow an alternative land route along the western coast through the territory of modern Azerbaijan. This path was most likely under the control of Muslim merchants, both local and from Khazaria and Azerbaijan, as well as experienced merchants from the central areas of the caliphate. Ibn Hordadbeh refers to the words of his friend al-Bukhturi, a poet of the 9th century, to confirm that merchants who had concluded treaties in the capital of Khazaria enjoyed special respect in Iraq (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 124). Obviously, there was competition between the two directions and between the merchants as well as vehicle owners, both overland and maritime, who served them.

The decision on the fate of goods at the bifurcation point – in Khazar Itil – was dictated by various factors. These were the convenience of cargo transportation, transportation costs, and traffic safety, as well as the preservation of the possibility of choosing the optimal choice

<sup>3</sup> More details about trade operations and routes of the Rus across the Caspian can be obtained from the following publications: Dozy, 1881: 562; Kmietowicz, 1970: 169-171; Marquart, 1903: 24, 350; Куник, 1903: 142; Асадов, 2012: 165; Asadov, 2016.

for the sale of goods in the course of moving to the final destination – in this case, from Itil to the central areas of the caliphate. On the Rus ships, goods and their owners were at the mercy of a team that was well armed and, of course, prone to violence and robbery. Thus, the Khazar authorities had to be in control of the ships of the Rus. Those who violated their trade agreements were held accountable to the control mechanisms established by the Khazars, who were keen to keep the trade functional, as constituted by the state policy and economic interests of the Khazar Khaganate. This policy gave the Khazars large profits from trade. The safety of this trade was in the interests of the Khazars. Rus raids into Muslim possessions, particularly in Azerbaijan, having begun in the 10th century, could have had the purpose of demonstrating the security benefits of the sea route for merchants. However, the Khazars showed the Russians that it was impossible to violate the agreement on the safety of transportation. In 912/913 the Khazar army completely defeated the Rus, who were returning to the mouth of the Volga after a raid into Azerbaijan (al-Masudi 2005, 147).

Merchants had opportunities and advantages on their way from Itil through the territory of Azerbaijan. The rich evidence of the Arabic sources on this issue is now more accessible to modern researchers of the history of Azerbaijan thanks to research work and translations by prominent Azerbaijani scholars: academicians Z. M. Bunyatov (1965) and N. M. Velikhanli (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986; 2016), and famous Azerbaijani historians S. B. Ashurbeyli (1983, 1990), M. H. Sharifli (2012), and G. A. Jiddy (1981). Among the foreign scientists who were specially engaged in toponymy and the caravan routes of Azerbaijan in the era of Arab rule, prominent Soviet-Russian scientists V. V. Barthold (1963b), B. N. Zakhoder (1962), and A. Yu. Yakubovsky (1946), and Russian-British orientalist V. F. Minorsky (1963) have to be mentioned.

Some, if not a significant part, of the goods of Azerbaijan were not in demand for long-distance international trade, but the transit position of the country on trade routes created demand for consumer goods along the way to the final destination, as well as for the infrastructure for servicing trade caravans.

The main highway that led from Baghdad to the South Caucasus was the famous Khorasan Road, which started from the Khorasan gates of the Abbasid capital (Le Strange 1905, 32). The branches from the Khorasan Road toward Azerbaijan began from the famous Behistun (Bisitun) Rock southwest of the ancient Medean capital Ekbatana, near modern Hamadan (Velikhanli 2016, 468). One direction was to Dinavar<sup>4</sup> and further to Zanjan, Maragha, Mayanj (Miyane) and Ardabil. The next stage was Varsan on the Araxes River, which was already considered the city of Arran (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 119). From Dinavar, there was an alternative track in the direction of Arran – first to the small town of Sisera, 20 *farsakhs* from Maragha, and then to Baylagan (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 120). At this border

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<sup>4</sup> The ruins of medieval Dinavar are located not far from the modern town of Sakhne in the province of Kermanshah in western Iran.

with the Arran sector of southern Azerbaijan, several settlements were named after cities in northern Azerbaijan.<sup>5</sup> The symmetry of the names of settlements in Arran and Azerbaijan testifies to the close trade and economic ties between these two regions in the Caliphate period. The population of these cities was probably ethnically and culturally homogeneous. The names of the cities were duplicated, probably due to migrations and relocations from one region to another (Vəlixanlı 2016, 468). The Baylagan mentioned in this route is a small town between Dinavar and Maragha. Ibn Khordadbeh points out various routes, many of which were of local importance, and even functioned only at a favorable season of the year – there were winter and summer routes (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986, 295).

From the city of Dinavar in western Iran, not far from the modern Iran-Iraq border, there were several routes of both international and local importance. The main road was the direction to Maragha and Ardabil, and Kursare (Kul-Sare) fortress between them was the place where fairs were regularly organized to welcome merchants from all countries. According to authors from the 10th century, the bazaar in Kursar was one of the largest in Azerbaijan on the road from the South Caucasus to Iraq. This fortress and bazaar was localized in the village of Kultepe about 50 km from Maragha. Merchants from Iraq, Tabaristan, and all of Khorasan gathered here to trade in various goods. The bazaar in Kursar was of particular importance as a center for the wholesale trade in cattle and pack animals (Buniyatov 1965, 161; Sharifi 2012, 399; Ibn Khordadbeh 1986, 293). This road, which connected Azerbaijan with Arran in the north, in this sector diverged precisely into three different directions – southbound to Iraq, westbound to Trabzon, and eastbound to Tabaristan and Jurjan. Merchants from various Muslim areas rushed here to arrange major trade and exchange transactions. These routes functioned until the time of the Arabs. It was not by chance that in the late Sasanian period, the Khazars, having established their dominance over the northern regions of Caucasian Albania and over eastern Georgia, sent their raids to Dinavar; that is, they marched along the trade routes for rich booty (al-Beladsori 1866, 194).

The road from Maragha to Ardabil extended further to the town of Varsan on the Araxes River bordering Arran and from there to Barda – the largest trading center of northern Azerbaijan, the former capital of Caucasian Albania, and the residence of Arab governors in the South Caucasus in the 9th century.<sup>6</sup> From there, the paths diverged in three main directions – north-east to Bab al-Abvab (Derbent), north-west to Tiflis, and west to Dabil, or Dvin, the former capital of the Armenian Arshakids, the ruins of which are 35 km away from Yerevan (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 122). Maragha was a hub in the network of trade routes of

<sup>5</sup> Azerbaijan in Arab sources was most often identified with the territory of present-day southern Azerbaijan, now part of Iran. The territory of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan to the north of the Iranian border was usually designated as Arran, which included lands up to Derbent and up to Tiflis. Along with this terminology, the toponyms of Shirvan (central-eastern part of modern Azerbaijan) and Jurzan (conventionally, the territory of north-western Azerbaijan and eastern Georgia) were used.

<sup>6</sup> The ruins of the medieval Barda are located not far from the modern Barda in the central part of Azerbaijan, near the confluence of the Terter River in Kura (Ibn Khordadbeh 1986).

Azerbaijan. From here it was possible to proceed to almost all the main destinations in the South Caucasus along various alternative routes, as well as to the south and east. In particular, in order to get to Dvin from Maragha, there was no need to follow the route indicated above via Barda. It was possible to go directly to Nashava (Nakhchivan) and further to Dabil. There were also ways to Marand and Tabriz (Vəlixanlı 2016, 469). The whole of Azerbaijan was also covered by secondary routes connecting the cities of the region with large trading centers and bazaars, which allowed merchants to flock to wholesale fairs, offer their goods to visiting merchants, and buy overseas wonders for their trade.

### **Barda – Center of Local Production and International Trade**

Barda in northern Azerbaijan was the largest multi-functional settlement of the medieval South Caucasus. It was the administrative center where the Arab governor resided, a major center of handicraft and agricultural production, and an international emporium which competed with Maragha in south Azerbaijan. Al-Muqaddasi, an Arab geographer and traveler of the 10th century, called Barda the center of the trade and economic zone in which he included Tiflis, Hunan, Bab al-Abwab, al-Abhan,<sup>7</sup> Gabala, Shakki, and Malazgard (al-Muqaddasi 1906, 51). Arab sources call Barda, Tiflis, and Bab al-Abwab the largest cities of Arran. The other cities of Arran listed above, as well as Varsan, Baylagan, Bardij, ash-Shammakhiyya (Shamakhi), Shirvan, Shabran, Lahijan, Janza (Ganja), and Shamkur (Shamkir), were considered less significant but well organized and comfortable for the convenience of visiting merchants and other guests (al-Istakhri 1927, 187-188; Ibn Haukal 1992, 194).

According to Arab authors and travelers, there was no city larger and more comfortable than Barda in the entirety of Khorasan down to Iraq. The city was known for the fertility of its villages and the abundance of agricultural products, the quality of which was famous throughout the Muslim East. Hazelnuts here were better than in Samarkand, and chestnuts better than those of ash-Sham (Syria). The local fig was the best of its kind. A lot of silk was produced in Barda, which was exported in large quantities to Khuzistan and Fars. Two varieties of local fish were hunted in the Kura River, one third of a farsakh away from the city, which were salted and exported to remote countries. Agricultural products and handicrafts were sold in the markets of Barda, the largest of which, al-Kurki, was located behind the city's fortress gates and occupied a vast territory equal to the size of the city itself. This bazaar ran on Sundays, and therefore the inhabitants called Sunday the day of al-Kurki. The Barda Bazaar competed with the Kursare Bazaar mentioned above, and was even larger than it (al-Istakhri 1927, 182-183; Ibn Haukal 1992, 290-291).

As we said above, the highway at Barda diverged in three main directions. To the

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<sup>7</sup> Most likely, this is a spoiled al-Abkhaz mentioned by the predecessors of al-Muqaddasi - see below.

northeast, the road went through the territory of northern Azerbaijan to Derbent, crossing over the Kura River to Shamakhi (ash-Shamakhiiyyu) and passing the small town of Barzanj. From Shamakhi, there were three travel days to the city of Sharvan<sup>8</sup> and then to al-Abkhaz, and from there, across the bridge over the Samur River to Derbent (Al-Istakhri 1927, 192). The road from Barda to Tiflis went through Janza (Ganja), Shamkur (Shamkir), Hunan, Qalat Ibn Kandman, and to Tiflis. Here, al-Istakhri lists several intermediate settlements on the road from Barda to Dabil (Dvin). It can be noted that a significant part of the settlements on these roads continues to remain on the modern map of Azerbaijan, although often medieval settlements were located at a distance from modern locations (Ganja, Barda, Gabala, Shamakhi/al-Yazidiyya, and Shamkir/al-Mutawakkiliyya). Wars and destructive incursions were the cause of the trade fading. The subsequent revival of trade routes in new political circumstances did not necessarily take place exactly along the same routes. A number of desolate intermediate settlements never returned to their former prosperity. For this reason, many cities mentioned by the Arabic sources are not on the modern map of Azerbaijan (Valikhanlı 2016, 469).

Barda was the central city on the map of the trade routes of the South Caucasus. The high Abbasid dignitary Kudama Ibn Jafar, who compiled a brief guide called *Kitab al-Kharaj* to the routes and countries in the first half of the 10th century, gave a brief overview of the trade routes of the South Caucasus. Barda was the center, and the roads diverged from Barda in different directions (Kodama 1967, 227). Of course, the transfer of the residence of the Arab governor from Dvin to Barda greatly contributed to the central position of Barda in the region. However the transfer of the capital of the governorship to the central part of Azerbaijan was, in turn, caused by the passage of the main trade routes through these territories to the Khazars (Buniyatov 1965, 152).

We will analyze this path in more detail. It is curious that in the 9th century, Ibn Khordadbeh did not pay special attention to the overland route from Barda to Derbent. He only briefly outlined the route indicating the starting and ending points: Barda – Bab al-Abvab. He mentioned some cities of Azerbaijan on this route in his information about cities in the South Caucasus. These were Shabran, Sharvan, and al-Abkhaz. These cities are mentioned in different contexts – in the information about their founders and in the listing of cities by province - but they are not listed in one line on the road from Barda to Derbent. However, Ibn Khordadbeh himself immediately after the information about the cities of Arminiyya and Arran and the main routes through these provinces places the news about the sea route from Jurjan to the Khazar capital at the mouth of the Volga (Ibn Khordadbeh 1967, 122-124). The authors of the 10th century, on the contrary, do not provide details of the trans-Caspian routes and trading operations of the Rus across the Caspian Sea, but they

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<sup>8</sup> Yakut al-Hamavi when describing this route mentions Shabran instead of Sharvan (note of the publisher of the Arabic text).

specifically distinguish the trade route from Barda to Derbent via Shamakhi, Shabran, and al-Abkhaz and across the bridge over the Samur River to Derbent (Al-Istakhri 1927, 192). Most likely, the reason was a shift of the main flow of goods from sea routes to overland tracks over the territory of Azerbaijan in the 10th century.

### **Medieval Derbent: Center of Trade Partnership in the Caucasus**

In 732, Maslama b. Abd al-Malik finally evicted the Khazars from Derbent. The talented commander and statesman correctly reasoned that the success of the Arab expansion depended on the spread of Islam among the population. He divided Derbent into urban areas. In four of them he settled Arab warriors and, according to legend, built a mosque in each quarter. At that time, there were a thousand Khazar households (*buyut*) in Derbent (Al-Kufi 1991, 249-250). A mosque was also built in the quarter inhabited by the Khazars (Brook 2006, 180). Derbent became the center of Islamization of the entire Caucasus.

The Muslim Khazars settled in other cities of Azerbaijan to the south of the borderland of Derbent – in Gabala, in Shamkir, and between Samur and Shemakha (Al-Beladorsi 1866, 203, 208; Al-Kufi 1991, 3, 219; Dunlop 1954, 64; Gordon 2001, 21; Golden 2004, 281). The population of Derbent and the nearby villages was ethnically quite diverse and spoke various languages (Al-Istakhri 1927, 192). The famous Turkologist Peter Golden believed that the Khazar language was spoken in Derbent, and traces of the Khazar language can be found in the northern dialects of Azerbaijan (Golden 2005, 207).

It can be argued based on the testimony of Arab sources that on the territory of Azerbaijan on the northern section of the road from Barda to Khazaria, a sedentary Khazar population settled. This population, of course, was involved in international trade. The city of Derbent was a key point in this trading system. Al-Istakhri provides accurate evidence that shows that goods from the non-Muslim world were brought to Derbent, and Muslim merchants came from Barda by caravan or sailed from Jurjan and Tabaristan to carry them away. Several easily transportable but valuable goods, such as saffron and linen clothes, were produced here for international trade (Al-Istakhri 1927, 184).

Interestingly, the production of linen clothing was established in Derbent, but the raw materials, apparently, came from the surrounding areas, as sources indicate that the city produced clothing, but the raw materials (in the text, “fruits”) were brought from outside. Studies of the historical spread of flax culture show northern Azerbaijan, the North Caucasus and eastern Ukraine, that is, territories under the political influence of the Khazar Khaganate and settlements of the Khazars, as a single area for the spread of this species of flax (Vavilov 1965, 133; Sinskaya 1969, 54-56).

In addition to linen products, saffron, and slaves, a dye extracted from the herb madder

was among the commodities of international trade exported from Derbent by sea. The most detailed report of this was left by al-Idrisi, according to which madder was grown throughout Arran from Derbent to Tiflis. It was collected and transported by sea to Jurjan and further to India. The 10th century authors al-Istahri and Ibn Haukal do not talk about exporting madder to India by sea, but claim that, on the contrary, people came from Barda and harvested and transported it to Barda and Varsan for final processing. It is obvious that al-Idrisi synthesized the information of al-Istahri and Ibn-Haukal in one message. News about shipping between al-Bab and the South Caspian Sea was also included therein. As a result, it turned out that madder was taken by ship to Jurjan, and from there to India by overland caravan. Transportation of some madder on the specified sea route to India cannot be excluded. However, it must be borne in mind that this was characteristic of the 9th - early 10th centuries, but not for the al-Idrisi time (Al-Idrisi 2002, 829-830; Al-Istakhri 1927, 190, 218; Ibn Haukal 1992, 329). Among the goods of international importance, one should also mention the prized breed of mules from Barda (Al-Istakhri 1927, 190), the so-called test stone from Shamkir, used to determine a sample of gold, and beaver pelts from Gabala (Ashurbeyli 1983, 93, 106).

Particular mention should be made of oil. The oil of the Absheron Peninsula was known in the ancient world. It was used for lighting, as a medicine against skin diseases, as an inflammatory agent in military affairs, and thickened oil was used for waterproofing roofs in houses and the hulls of sea and river vessels (Aliyeva 2014, 32). An Albanian historian of the 7th century, Moses Kalankatuyi, in his chapter "Information on the fertility and abundance of the country of Aluank" (Arran), mentions oil, silk, and cotton among other things (Kalankatuatsi 1984, 25). We also know that the governor of Caliph al-Mansur in Arran, Yazid b. Usayd al-Sulami, appointed to Barda in July 753, overlaid the oilfields of Shirvan (probably in Baku) with a tax (Al-Beladsori 1866, 210; Buniyatov 1965, 137). Fuel oil was used in military affairs as an effective means of protecting fortress walls from an enemy storming a city. Therefore, oil production was important not only for international trade, but also for local consumption in the frontier fortresses of Arran.

Not all information about the products and goods of Azerbaijan can be found in the works of authors from the center of the Muslim world. Local sources retain some details that were not included in the works of famous writers of the golden age of medieval Arabic literature. Abbas-Quli Aga Bakikhanov, citing a local source from Derbent, reports that as soon as the Arabs finally captured Derbent in 734, the commander Maslama b. Abd-al-Malik ordered the construction of a reservoir for oil in the city (Bakikhanov 1991, 55). Since al-Istahri indicates that oil was exported from the port of Baku, the oil storage facility in Derbent most likely had defensive significance for the city, which was constantly threatened by the Khazars (Buniyatov 1965, 137).

Let us turn to al-Istakhri and Ibn Haukal, who stated that there were three major cities

throughout Arran: Bab al-Abwab, Barda, and Tiflis. They listed other cities of Arran, but indicated that they were smaller, although very well-maintained (Al-Istakhri 1927, 187; Ibn Haukal 1992, 194). Our sources do not provide details about these small cities, with the exception of very insignificant remarks about two or three of them. Baku is not mentioned even in a simple list of these cities, apparently because it was not an intermediate point on the land trade route from Barda to Derbent. Thus, more remarkable is al-Istakhri's evidence that mentions Baku along with Derbent on the Caspian Sea. In the context of this logic, the mention of the port of Baku and the presence of oil in it indicates that both the city and its products were of paramount importance for international trade in the Caspian Sea basin. Oil could be transported in tanks by caravans to the junction with the main trade route from Derbent to Barda, and for export to the south east, loaded onto sea vessels in the port of Baku.

### **Azerbaijan: Transit Country and Exporter**

Information from Arab sources, briefly presented above, allows us to conclude that a number of goods were produced in Azerbaijan that were important for long-distance international trade. At the same time, inside the country, in the north and in the south, there was an intensive exchange of locally produced products, transported both along the main routes of the Silk Road and along secondary roads connecting the major trading cities of the country with smaller settlements. A special treatise of the 9th century, "at-Tabassur bi-t-Tijara" (Reflections on Trade) by the famous Arab writer Abu Usman Amr ibn Bahr al-Jahiz (d. 869), provides a good opportunity to determine the place of Azerbaijani goods in the structure of the international trade of the Muslim world during the period of the Arab-Khazar partnership. From this information, as well as from the information of the cited authors of the tenth century, it becomes clear that the trade with Khazaria and through Khazaria along the trans-Caspian sea routes and alternatively the land roads of Arran and Azerbaijan was a fundamental direction of international trade in the 9th and the first half of the 10th centuries.

Special demand was for furs, which were brought from different countries. However, the most valuable pelts came from the Khazars or were imported through Khazaria. For example, the author writes that the best squirrel furs were the back of an ermine from the Caspian lands,<sup>9</sup> which, however, had to be distinguished from deceptive hare-fur imitations. Fox fur from Khazaria was considered the best fur, alongside which was also exported a less valuable red fox. The best sable was brought from China, while the Khazar fur was the

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<sup>9</sup> The editors of the text believe that the word "al-Khazari" in the text is an indication of the origin of goods from the Caspian regions (note. 4). Perhaps this can be true, but we still think that it is a special indication of the lands of the Khazars, not the Caspian Sea lands (*Bahr al-Khazar*).



second most valued (Al-Djahiz 1932, 335-336).

Concerning the slaves who came from the Khazar country, the information of al-Istahri does not contradict al-Jahiz's reports, but clarifies their meaning. He reports that in Khazaria, children of Muslims, Christians, and Jews could not be sold into slavery, but this was allowed for pagans (Al-Istakhri 1961, 131). Let us recall that it was in Derbent that slaves from the infidel countries were brought to market (Al-Istakhri 1927, 184). It becomes clear that the Khazar transit and the goods of Khazaria itself were transported by the main road through Derbent and Barda.

Famous mules from Barda, mentioned by al-Istahri, had been attested by al-Jahiz as a special product of international trade a century earlier (Al-Djahiz, 1932: 346). It is noteworthy that Barda and its main product are mentioned along with the largest directions of international trade – along with goods from Egypt, Isfahan, Fars, Khazaria, and Samarkand. Arminiyya and Azerbaijan, for example, are combined into one category in the list in parallel with Barda. From there, they brought felt, bag saddles, mats and soft carpets, belts for outerwear, and wool to take to distant countries (Al-Djahiz 1932, 348). At the time of al-Jahiz, Barda mules were indicated as the most demanded goods, but this does not mean that the goods mentioned by al-Istakhri and Ibn Haukal were not present in the trade circulation of the Muslim world a century earlier. Al-Jahiz did not set himself the task to characterize each region, but to select the most popular and sought-after products. In particular, he pointed to the special quality of the Khazar furs, but did not name the furs among the special products of the Khazars.<sup>10</sup> Comparing the news of al-Jahiz (9th century) with the information of the authors of the 10th century, it can be concluded that the variety of goods Azerbaijan supplied for long-distance trade increased as domestic production developed. Describing the madder<sup>11</sup> as a commodity of international importance, al-Jahiz claims that it grew only in three places – in the west in Andalusia, in the Tarim district near Shiraz, and in Fars. Our authors of the 10th century, and after them al-Idrisi, spoke confidently about the growth of this grass in the territory from Derbent to Barda, Tiflis, and Dabil, and about the special role of the Barda population in collecting, processing and exporting this dye to distant countries.

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<sup>10</sup> He could have been informed that the best furs supplied from Khazaria were actually produced not by the Khazars themselves, but by their tributaries, the Slavs, and the northern peoples. However, this was hardly important for the author in determining the source of the goods. We know that furs were also obtained in the territory of Khazaria itself, and some of its species were also supplied from Azerbaijan, such as beaver skins from Gabala, which have been mentioned above. Al-Jahiz focused merely on particularly exotic products from each locality without mentioning other minor items.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Jahiz (1932) says *qirmiz*; al-Istakhri (1927; 1961; 1967) says *qirmiz*, or *sumva*.

## Conclusion

### **Azerbaijan in the Trade of Eurasia and the Middle East in the 7th – 10th Centuries**

Cooperation between the Arab Caliphate and the Khazars on the Silk Road contributed to the active involvement of Azerbaijan, southern and northern, in international trade. The ports of Derbent and Baku were connected with the South Caspian ports in Jurjan and Tabaristan. From there, trade routes led to the Middle East and India. Surely, there was also a maritime communication with the Mangyshlak Peninsula, where in the first half of the 10th century, a tribal unit of the Oguz was reliably witnessed as detached from the main mass of the tribesmen. The coast there was not entirely convenient for approaching ships, since the sea was either shallow or there were underwater cliffs near the coast, which prevented free maneuvering. Ibn Haukal warns of the danger of shipwreck and the loss of goods because the Turks could take possession of them (Ibn Haukal 1992, 330).

Westbound land routes through Azerbaijan led to Tiflis, south-west to Dabil, and the southern track to Ardabil. Transit trade involved local people in profitable operations. The location of the provinces of Azerbaijan between the possessions of the Khazar Kaganate and the central regions of the Muslim world contributed to the growth of local production and services for the needs of caravan trade. It is not surprising that all the authors of the first half of the 10th century unanimously argued that the cities of Arran were very pleasant and well-maintained, and the country produced a lot of food products – fruits and vegetables, livestock, linen, silk, and cotton clothes. In Barda, for example, a large number of hotels and baths were especially highlighted (Ibn Haukal 1992, 190). Archaeological finds indicate a high quality of pottery production. Large wholesale fairs were located in Arran and South Azerbaijan. We know the names of two of them – al-Kurki in Barda and Kursare near Maragha. It was in these emporiums that large consignments of goods could change ownership, and tired merchants, having exchanged their goods, could go back.

It is especially important to note that almost the entire transit territory between the Caliphate and the Khazar Khaganate in the 8th-9th centuries began to consolidate as an integrated economic space with local production, a domestic market, and a developed international trade infrastructure. We have seen examples of how the procurement of raw materials and their processing were carried out in different areas of the country. Cattle were driven to the pastures of the neighboring region; animal products, wool and leather, were processed into valuable consumer goods in the cities of Azerbaijan and became subjects of international trade. Barda, Ganja, Baku, Derbent and other cities and trading centers were characterized in our sources in close economic cooperation with the livestock and agricultural zones of northern Azerbaijan and in a single system of trade and economic relations within the country and with south Azerbaijan. It is remarkable that al-Istakhri and

Ibn Haukal compare the main centers of this economic zone with each other in the whole space from the Khazar border, i.e. from Derbent to Ardabil (Al-Istakhri 1927, 183-184, 187; Ibn Haukal 1992, 291, 294). 9th-10th century coin hoards in the territory of Azerbaijan indicate a developed domestic market and intensive international trade through the territory of Azerbaijan. Large mints were in Ardabil, Barda, Beylagan, and Derbent (Rajabli 1997, 29). The frequent single finds of copper coins of local mints and the practical absence of hoards of copper coins in the territory of Azerbaijan testify to the development of cities and urban market trade (Rajabli 1997, 30-31). All copper coins were in constant circulation. Scrap silver coins found in treasure hoards in Azerbaijan at the time of Arab domination (Jafarov 2013, 22), in our opinion, testify to the demand for locally produced goods and local services provided to foreign merchants in the cities of Azerbaijan. It is difficult to agree with the opinion that the presence of copper coins in silver treasures precluded the use of silver scrap in retail trade (Jafarov 2013, 22). In the Muslim areas, there was a widespread practice of breaking off coins and petty trading through silver trimming.

However, this favorable geopolitical and economic situation in the region changed dramatically as a result of Byzantine policies against the Arab-Khazar alliance. The semi-legendary Byzantine-Russian peace treaties of the early 10th century, which had indications of favoring Russian merchants in Constantinople, and their trade through the territory of Byzantium, can be considered evidence of the changing trends of trade and political unions in the region. Byzantium scouted for ways out of political isolation in the region, building allied relations with the Kievan Rus.

The raiding of Abaskun by the Rus, presumably in the mid-60s of the 9th century, followed shortly after their march against Constantinople in 860 and the conclusion of a treaty of friendship and peace with the Byzantine Empire that provided for them the granting of duty-free trade on the territory of Byzantium (Sakharov 1980, 74). Similarly, the Rus campaigns against Azerbaijan in 912/13 and 943/4 could have been the result of the Byzantine-Russian treaties concluded after the Rus campaigns to Constantinople in 911 and 941. The attacks of the Rus on the Muslim possessions in Azerbaijan and the South Caspian littoral lands shook the tripartite Khazar-Arab-Russian alliance, which determined the stability in the basin of the Caspian Sea and the safety of the movement of trade caravans and ships. Threats to peace and stability reduced the volume of trade, undermined the incomes of the Khazars, and narrowed their ability to fulfill their obligations to ensure the security of trade routes. These failures destabilized the internal situation in the Khazar state.

The 10th century was a time of raids in the Caspian regions by Varangians and even attempts to control the internal territories of the Muslim possessions in Azerbaijan (Dixon 1998, 55-56). Despite the fact that the Rus at first were thrown back from the Caspian Sea, it was clear that the former partners had turned into adversaries and that military clashes with the Rus would continue for the Khazars.

It also became obvious to the Arabs that the Khazar state was not able to fulfill its obligations and continue being an equal partner, especially since the Khazar elite and the government made the final choice in favor of Judaism and began to oppress Muslims in their land.<sup>12</sup> The well-known embassy of Ahmad Ibn Fadlan occurred at the time between the two largest Rus campaigns in the Muslim Caspian provinces (921-922). By this time, the Bulgar king had already converted to Islam, and consequently the Arab embassy consisted of theologians to strengthen the faith and assist in the construction of mosques (Kovalevsky 1956, 121). Thus, Khazaria was threatened with isolation. Actually, this was exactly what happened: Svyatoslav's campaign, supported by nomadic Oghuzes in 965, if not completely destroyed, then shook the Khazar Khaganate to the ground. Sarkel was taken, which the Russians renamed Belaya Vezha or simply translated the Khazar name into Slavic. The era of Khazaria's three-hundred-year domination in international trade and in the region was over.

The era of the centralized power of the Arab Caliphate, favorable for the cities of Azerbaijan, was left behind. The well-being of the country was associated with the viability of the Arab-Khazar partnership and with the fate of the Khazar Khaganate. In the coming era, a strong nomadic empire interested in intensive international trade with the Middle East through the territory of Azerbaijan was not created. A second historical chance for Azerbaijan to enter a phase of geopolitical amplitude falls on the modern era after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Along with a resurgent interest in north-south routes, the prospect of west-east transit has simultaneously been enhanced due to the new project ideas of transportation across the Caspian Sea. The right choice of long-term alliances and commitments is the foundation for the prosperity of the country in the 21st century.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn Fadlan reports that the Khazar king, having heard about the destruction of the synagogue in the neighboring Muslim region, ordered the destruction of the minaret of the cathedral mosque in his capital and the execution of muezzins (Kovalevsky 1956, 14).

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