

THE SILK TRADE FROM ILKHANIDS TO AQQOYUNLU

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The initial phase of the Mongol invasion resulted in the establishment of relative political stability in the vast expanses of Eurasia, which came under the control of a single political entity - the Mongol realm. This contributed to a fairly rapid restoration of the commercial links and trade routes between the East and the West. During this period, Chinese silk again became available in large quantities in the Western markets. At the same time, the beginning of silk production and manufacturing of silk fabrics in Italy and the fashion flash for these goods in Western countries affected trade between Europe and the Muslim world. The centers of silk production in the Ilkhanid Empire were some provinces of Azerbaijan and Persia, where from it was exported in large numbers along the trade routes of Anatolia and Syria to the Mediterranean ports and further to the west. There are numerous testimonies of European travelers, and Muslim authors related the international silk trade in 13th-15th centuries, ie in the era from the Mongol Ilkhanid Empire till the reign of the Turkman Aqqoyunlu dynasty. One of the most informative documentary sources on this issue are the legislative codes (kanunname) of sultan Uzun Hasan from the Aqqoyunlu dynasty regarding the eastern provinces of the Asia Minor. This article presents and analyzes the information from these documents concerning the whole range of goods related to silk and silk fabrics trade in the period under the consideration.

Keywords: Silk trade, Chinese silk, Ilkhanids, Aqqoyunlu state, Tabriz, Shirvan, Gilan, silk fabrics, caravan routes, legislative code, Uzun Hasan, taxation, tamga, Azerbaijan, Persia, Bursa, Asia Minor

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From the ancient period to the Middle Ages, silk emerged not only as a symbol of material welfare and luxury, but also as a link between different countries and cultures. Demand for silk was equally great both in Asia and Europe and it is generally recognized that trade caravans did not merely follow the Silk Road routes; they were also channels of communication to disseminate ideas and values, and to identify the achievements of other people.

It was the huge-scale conquests of Chingiz Khan and his fellow soldiers in the first half of the 13 century that led to the formation of the Mongol Empire, stretching from the Pacific littoral to the Black Sea area. Thus, in the period under consideration, nearly all the Silk Road, commencing from North China and ending Persia and Anatolia, fell under the control of this single realm. The biggest ever empire in the history of mankind managed to restore the control over the trade roots in Eurasia for the first time after the downfall of Turkic Kaganate.

It is noteworthy that these events concurred with the fashion for silk fabrics in Europe. The period of the Crusades (1095–1291) was marked by European familiarity with the mode of life and customs of the Muslim world, the penetration of new cultural standards and elements of oriental luxury in the West, including the fashion for silk textiles and clothing. At the same time, this period of history has become a witness to the establishment of numerous Latin trading colonies in the Levant and the Near East, when the trade cities of Florence, Genoa, and Venice started to advance their commercial interests well beyond the coastal cities, in the eastern direction. Thus, as a result of close acquaintance with the culture of the Muslim Orient, Western societies adapted themselves to new tastes, and from this point, demand for eastern splendor and wares became a driving force of European trade. This successful mediation between the West and Asia in the sphere of eastern wares trade, resulted in the blossoming forth of Levant trade and Italian trade cities in the 13th-15th centuries.

With the disappearance of the last Crusader states in the Holy Land and the papal embargo on trade with the Muslims (1291–1344), alternate markets developed in the Levant, Constantinople, and the Black Sea ports.¹ Italians, the main intermediaries in international trade between the East and the West, were forced to look for new markets for the purchase of Eastern goods outside of the Mamluk Sultanate, in the region controlled by the Mongolian states, the Golden Horde and Ilkhanids. They also had to seek new trade routes by which Asian commodities could be relatively smoothly delivered to Europe. This facilitated the gradual displacement of European commercial interests to the north and the Black Sea area.

During this period the Genoese merchants were especially active, establishing trading colonies in the Black Sea ports of Asia Minor and the Crimea, soon resulting in a network of Genoan trading posts: in Trebizond (Trabzon) at the end of the 12 century (the Venetian one was founded in 1319); presumably, in Pontian Heraclius (Eregli) from the 1360s to the first

¹ J.Day. *The Levant Trade in the Middle Ages*, p. 808

half of the 14 century; in Amasra (Samastro, Amastrida), Sinop, and Amis (Simisso, Samsun).² The Genoese also established commercial colonies such as Kaffa (Caffa), Cembalo, Soldaia and others in the Crimea, along with a commercial factory in Tabriz, where they could exchange woollens being brought from the West for local silk and silk fabrics, as well as Indian spices, delivered through Hormuz or Baghdad.³

The main trading route during this period began in Tabriz and ran along the main road through Erzurum and Erzincan to Sivas. From there one road ran to the city of Konya, the capital of the Seljuk State of Asia Minor. Another ran to the Mediterranean Sea, to Laiazzo (Ayas) in Cilicia, near the modern town of Yumurtalik in Turkey, the principal seaport from which commodities were exported to European countries. Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler and merchant in the mid-13th century, noted that there was a city named Laias (Laiazzo) on the seacoast, “which carries on a very great trade; for thither all the spices, rich cloths, and other precious articles, are brought from India across the Euphrates, which the merchants of Venice, of Pisa, of Genoa, come to purchase”.⁴ Indeed, the port of Laiazzo largely competed with Alexandria in Egypt, causing the Mamluks to seize and destroy the city in 1347, after which, the route lost its importance.

In the meanwhile, the most intensive route was the one linking Tabriz to Trebizond. This road linked China, Central Asia, Persia, and Azerbaijan, and ran through the cities of Eastern Anatolia, such as Erzurum, Erzincan, and Bayburt. It took an average of about one month for a caravan to move from Tabriz to Trebizond, so this was considered the shortest route from the East to the West in the late 13th – early 14th centuries. Despite all the political turmoil and a multitude of obstacles for smooth trade throughout the Silk Road at this time, the section of road from Tabriz to Trebizond was constantly used until the mid- 1340s. The last third of the 13th century to the early 1340s was the most favorable for the advancement of Italian intermediary trade in the region.⁵

Azerbaijan was the metropolitan center of the Ilkhanid Empire from the mid- 13th century, with Tabriz, and then Sultanieh, as the capital of this powerful Mongolian realm. Historical sources indicate the rapid economic development of Azerbaijan in this period, along with prosperity of handicraft production and trade in the cities, and especially the progress of international trade along the Silk Road routes in the region. Certainly, the relative political stability which Ilkhanid rulers managed to maintain contributed to the development of the productive forces lying at the heart of the country’s economic recovery.

In the mid-14th century, Tabriz became a major center of Asian commerce. In particular,

² S.P.Karpov. *Ital’ianskiye morskkiye respubliki*, pp. 66-108

³ H.İnalçık. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi*, p. 271

⁴ *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. 206

⁵ S.P.Karpov. *Ital’ianskiye morskkiye respubliki*, pp. 61-62

silk and different kinds of spices comprised a significant proportion of the merchandise exported from the city. Various sources describe the commercial transactions in Tabriz relating to spices, since the end of the 13th century. From the 14th to the early 16th centuries, these sources document so called “thin” and “heavy” spices, particularly pepper, ginger, and cloves, as well as dyes, including cinnabar and indigo. The frankincense from Tabriz was known to be better than that from Egypt, while the “makeup” perfumes and ointments from Tabriz were also famous. In the 13-14th centuries Tabriz even came to compete with Alexandria, which was the most important wholesale market for spices in the Mediterranean. The Venetian geographer and statesman Marino Sanudo the Elder (about 1260 - 1338), who advocated the resumption of the Crusades against the Muslims and the economic blockade of Egypt, believed that the export of spices from Tabriz could fully cover the needs of Christian countries in this strategic commodity.⁶

However, silk remained to be one of the major goods and was in the greatest demand in European markets. Since the mid-13th century, that is, after the establishment of the Ilkhanid realm on the vast areas from Khorasan to Central Anatolia, relatively cheap Chinese raw silk was exported to Europe by Italian merchants, mostly the Genoese and the Venetians. Meanwhile, Europeans learnt how to process raw silk and manufacture top-quality silk cloth, first in Lucca (Toscana), then in Bologna, Florence, Genoa and Venice.⁷

Therefore, the restoration of the Silk Road under the Mongols was very opportune. The European markets had been swamped with cheap Chinese silk products and the Chinese silk replenished the West in huge quantities. As H.Inalcik has correctly noted, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the European sales markets of silk and silk fabrics for the development of the structural bases of the economies in Asia Minor, Azerbaijan, and Persia.⁸

Indeed, many sources, including the writings of European travelers, report about the prime sericulture and silk trade in areas of Azerbaijan and Persia, including Tabriz, starting from the mid- 12th century. The author of “A’jaib ad-dunya”, the Persian geographical work of the early 13th century, details the production of silk in the cities of Azerbaijan stating, for instance, that Ardabil was famous for its beautiful black silk textiles (*jame-e dibai-ye siyah-e letif*).⁹ The author also reports about raw silk among other goods of Arran, the historical region of Azerbaijan to the north of the Aras River¹⁰, as well as its capital Barda and city of Ganja.¹¹

⁶ S.P.Karpov. Ital’ianskiye morskoye respubliki, p. 110-112

⁷ H.İnalçık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, p. 269

⁸ Ibid., p. 270

⁹ A’jaib ad-dunya, p. 488

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 491

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 497, 526. Even in the 18th century the Ottoman legislative code (kanunname) of Ganja of 1727 reports on the production of silk in this area. The document says that the silk yarn produced there had two varieties – thick

Meanwhile, even in the mid- 10th century, the Arab geographer Ibn Hawkal called Barda (Berda'a) "the mother of Arran [cities] (*ummu Arran*) and the heart (literally, eye – '*aynu tilka-d-diyar*) of that region", and wrote that after Rey and Isfahan there was no bigger city in the entire area between Iraq and Tabaristan. According to him, "a large amount of silk is produced in Berda'a, since mulberry trees are public [there], they do not have owners, and they are not sold or bought".¹²

We can find information about silk production in the section of "A'jaib ad-dunya" on other cities of Azerbaijan – Salmas and Khoy.¹³ The author also reports that Tabriz was a huge city in Azerbaijan, which became the capital during the reign of Atabegs of the Ildegiz dynasty. According to this geographical work, there were no crafts in the world which were not practiced in this city, and among its products it highlighted the different sorts of silk textiles and products.¹⁴ Marco Polo wrote that Tabriz (Toris) was a great city and the people there "live by merchandise, and by fabricating fine cloths of silk and gold. The place is so well situated that merchants proceed hither from India, Baldach, Mosul, Cremosor, and many other places. The Latin traffickers come to meet those from strange countries, from whom they purchase precious pearls and other valuable articles".¹⁵

A certain Italian, who visited Tabriz in the early 14th century, also reported that it was a great city, which attracted merchants from around the world to engage in trade; according to local Christians, the ruler received from this city more income than the King of France from across his country.¹⁶ Or, according to "The Travels of Sir John Mandeville", Tabriz in 1332 was the greatest city in the world and its income from commerce exceeded that received by the richest Christian king from his entire realm.¹⁷ The same assertion can be found in another European source – the early 15th century travelogue of the Bavarian soldier, Johann Schiltberger. He relates that the ruler of the country "has a larger revenue from the city of Thauris (Tabriz), than has the most powerful king in Christendom, because a great many merchants come to it".¹⁸ Indeed, the total amount of trading fees (*tamga*) from silk in 1341 in Tabriz reached 300 thousand dinars, which in itself was a huge amount and in scope exceeded the fees of all

(called *kenar*) and thin (called *sherbaf*). They differed in prices as well. One batman of the thick silk yarn would cost about 10 kuruş, while thin yarn valued higher – from 18 to 28 kuruş (Ö.L.Barkan. *Kanunlar*, p. 195-196).

¹² Abu'l-Kasim Ibn Hawkal, pp. 240-241

¹³ A'jaib ad-dunya, p. 512

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 498-499

¹⁵ The Travels of Marco Polo, pp. 211-212

¹⁶ S.M.Onullahi. XIII-XVII əsrlərdə Təbriz şəhərinin tarixi, p. 62

¹⁷ The Travels of Sir John Mandeville, p. 101; O.Turan. *Selçuklular Tarihi ve Türk-İslam Medeniyeti*, p. 345

¹⁸ *Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger*, p. 44

other articles.¹⁹ The “Practices of Commerce” by Francesco Balducci Pegolotti and Giorgio di Lorenzo Chiarini in the 14th and 15th centuries provides detailed information on the silk trade in Tabriz, its types and categories, modes of weighing, and delivery to Trebizond, etc.²⁰

The silk textiles of Tabriz occupied a special place in the relations between the two Mongol states – the Ilkhanids and the Golden Horde – in the 13th-14th centuries. As is known, during the conquest of the Near East and Baghdad by Hulagu Khan (1256-1265), military troops from the Ulus of Juchi were also attached to his army. Later on these troops settled on the territory of the Ilkhanid State in Azerbaijan. This was one of the reasons why the Golden Horde claimed these lands from the Ilkhanids in the 13th-14th centuries. However, a more important basis for conflict between the two Mongolian states was a desire to control the urban centers of Azerbaijan, which had well-developed crafts, and which were linked by the caravan routes of international trade. According to al-Umari, at the request of Berke Khan (1257-1266), the Ilkhanid ruler Abaqa (1265-1282) allowed to open in Tabriz a large workshop (*karkhaneh*) for textile manufacture, all the products of which were exported to the Golden Horde. After the discord that occurred between the two states, Abaqa ordered the destruction of this workshop. However, it is noteworthy that later on it was restored and continued to function as before, sending fabrics and clothing to the Golden Horde.²¹

In this context, William of Rubruck, a Flemish Franciscan missionary and traveler, reported in the mid- 13th century about the clothing and customs of the Mongols of the Golden Horde, writing that “from Cataia, and other regions of the east, and also from Persia and other regions of the south, are brought to them silken and golden stuffs and cloth of cotton, which they wear in summer”.²² If we consider that by Persia here he meant lands conquered by Hulagu, which later composed the Ilkhanid realm, we are talking primarily about Azerbaijan and Gilan, where silk weaving was developed.

Meanwhile, raw silk production received further impetus in the Ilkhanid period in some countries of the Near East, first of all, along the south-eastern littoral of the Caspian Sea. Major centers were Shirvan, Ganja-Qarabagh in Azerbaijan, Gilan and Mazandaran in Persia. Hamdallah Mustawfi Qazvini reported in 1340 on the production of high quality silk in Qabala, one of the towns in Shirvan and the former capital of ancient Caucasian Albania.²³ As far back as in the early 15th century, Clavijo, the Spanish Ambassador to the Timurid court, referred to Shirvan (*Shamakhi* or *Xamahi* in the source) saying that all the silk which was made there

¹⁹ H.İnalçık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, p. 274

²⁰ S.P.Karpov. Ital'ianskiye morskije respubliki, p. 114

²¹ A.A.Alizade. Socialno-ekonomicheskaya i politicheskaya istoriya Azerbajjana, p. 338

²² The Journey of William of Rubruck, p. 70

²³ Nuzhat al-Qulub, p. 141

was sent to Sultanieh, and merchants came there for the silk, even from Venice and Genoa.²⁴ However, occasionally Italian merchants themselves traveled for it to the Caspian shores.

Historical sources also report about the production of silk in large quantities in Gilan. According to Hamdallah Qazvini it was manufactured in many provinces of Gilan (*Jilanat*).²⁵ This country, which had long maintained its relative independence, was conquered in the early 14th century by the Mongols. The Ilkhanid ruler, Uljaytu (1304-1316), in an effort to seize the taxes of Gilan and get power over the silk of that region, brought in his army in 1307.²⁶ The Timurid historian Hafiz Abru wrote that after the conquest of the country he imposed a duty (*kharaj*) for silk produced there.²⁷

Hamdallah Qazvini also details silk production in other provinces of Persia, such as Mazandaran.²⁸

Azerbaijani and Persian silk gradually forced Chinese silk out of the European markets. This process visibly manifested itself in the mid-14th century, when instability and internecine wars in all the Mongolian states made it impossible to deliver the silk from China to the West. Neither was it coincidental that Chinese silk was almost completely superseded by raw materials from the Near East in the late 14th century.²⁹

It should be noted that the quality of raw silk during this period was different, and its price in the Near East and European markets varied accordingly. In general, the quality depended on its origin. Chinese silk was the cheapest because of its mediocre quality. Nevertheless, it was the most popular and profitable product, since in the 13th century its cost in Genoa was 3 times that of its price in China. A higher quality and accordingly more expensive silk originated from the Caspian regions of Gilan, Shirvan and Ganja-Qarabagh, as well as from Merv in Turkestan. Shirvan silk, from which high quality fabric was manufactured in Kemah and Bursa in Asia Minor, was highly appreciated. In Venice and Genoa it was used in the production of velvet.³⁰

The trade route from Tabriz to Trebizond and the Mediterranean seaports once again revived the economies of the cities of Eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan, which resulted, inter alia, in the restoration of the old and the intensive construction of new caravanserais. Thus, according to Ibn Bibi, Amir Shams al-Din Omar Qazvini, messenger of the Great Khan Ögedei (1229-1241), reported that Erzurum was one of the most important and major retail markets

²⁴ Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, p. 93

²⁵ Nuzhat al-Qulub, pp. 230-232

²⁶ S.N.Virani. The Ismailis in the Middle Ages, p. 33

²⁷ Hafiz-e Abru, p. 76

²⁸ Nuzhat al-Qulub, pp. 225-227

²⁹ H.İnalçık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, p. 269

³⁰ S.P.Karpov. Ital'ianskiye morskiye respubliki, pp. 114-115

in the region.³¹

However, the political and ideological unity of Pax Mongolica was short-lived. Ever growing conflicts between various Mongol Uluses led to the disintegration of the once unified Chingizid realm. Tense relations between the Golden Horde, the Chagatay and the Ilkhanid states resulted in military confrontation between them. These, in turn, damaged the normal functioning of the Silk Road and export of the silk to the West. Moreover, the disintegration of the Ilkhanid realm in the mid-14th century caused extremely negative consequences for the further development of commerce in the region, since the protracted internal disorders and frequent clashes between different military entities began to jeopardize the safety of trade routes and caravans. Moreover, in 1340-41, the Genoese factory was destroyed in Tabriz and the Italian merchants were killed and banished from the city.

Numerous internecine strikes largely undermined the country's economy and international trade in particular. The roads became so dangerous that merchants no longer ventured to carry their goods to Tabriz and other cities. According to the testimony of one medieval author, after the death of the last Ilkhanid ruler Abu Said (1316-1335), security was replaced by risk, justice by oppression, and many stately old buildings were turned into ruins. The Jalairid dynasty, which superseded the Ilkhanids, tried to regain the political and economic stability of the country and bring Tabriz again to the center of international trade. Thus, the Jalairid ruler Sheikh Uways (1356-1374) called on Italian merchants to return to Tabriz and conduct commerce there, promising to reduce customs taxes for them. To this end, he sent a letter to the Doge of Venice through the mediation of the Emperor of Trebizond. As this became known, many merchants and traders gathered at that time in Trebizond, expecting the caravan route from Tabriz to Trebizond to be opened, though they were afraid to follow this path because of its insecurity and the high risk of being robbed by numerous predatory gangs.³²

Apparently, the Jalairids and the Italians had reasons for not trusting each other. This is evidenced by Clavijo, who wrote that during the reign of the same Sheikh Uways, the Genoese tried to restore their commercial factory at Tabriz and bought a piece of land on a hill for the purpose of building a castle upon it. However, Sheikh Uways changed his mind, and "when the Genoese wished to build the castle, he sent for them and told them that it was not the custom for merchants to build castles in his country".³³

Thus, all these events, together with the invasion of the Horde army from the north to the territory of Azerbaijan, resulted in Tabriz's partial loss of its previous significance as a center of international commerce. Although the Spanish envoy, who visited Tabriz in 1404, called it a "very large and rich city, owing to the quantity of merchandize that passes through it, every

³¹ Histoire des Seldjoucides d'Asie Mineure d'après l'arabeg du Seldjouknameh d'Ibn-Bibi, p. 202

³² S.M.Onullahi. XIII-XVII əsrlərdə Təbriz şəhərinin tarixi, pp. 63-65

³³ Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, p. 88

day”, nevertheless, he noted that “in former days it was more populous”.³⁴ Consequently, the main trade routes connecting the East with the West shifted south again, to the area of the Red Sea and the ports of Egypt and Syria, which were under the control of the Mamluks. To a more limited extent, the northern route from Central Asia and the Volga region to the Black Sea, through Tana (Azak, modern Azov), was performing the function of international trade highway, which was under the control of the Khans of the Golden Horde. At the same time, active functioning of the section from Hajitarkhan (Astrakhan) to Tana further shifted the commercial interests of Genoese and Venetian merchants to the area of the Black Sea. This interest was not diminished over time, despite the siege of Kaffa by Khan Janibek (1342-1357) in 1343.

The last years of the 14th century were marked by the fact that the former possessions of the Ilkhanid Empire were incorporated into the newly established state of Tamerlane (1370-1405). The fight that erupted between Tamerlane and the Golden Horde’s Khan Tokhtamysh (1380-1395) was evidently caused by fierce competition for control over the caravan routes of international trade. As is known, this fight ended in victory for Tamerlane. In 1395 he defeated the Tokhtamysh’s army on the Terek River and then made a trip deep into his lands, with the result that he captured and plundered Tana, and devoured the two main centers of the Golden Horde – Hajitarkhan and Saray-Berke. Tamerlane aimed by this to diminish the northern section of the Silk Road and refocus the main flows of international trade along the caravan routes passing through the lands of the former Ilkhanid realm, and it should be noted that he succeeded to a large extent.³⁵ The destruction of Baghdad by Tamerlane in 1400 also contributed to the revival of commerce in Tabriz and Azerbaijan.³⁶

Not surprisingly, historical sources once again witnessed in the late 14th – early 15th centuries some intensification of international commercial operations in Azerbaijan and northern Persia, as well as the restoration by Tabriz and Sultanieh of their function as main markets of eastern commodities for European merchants. For instance, Clavijo reported at that time about Sultanieh, that it was very populous, but not so large as Tabriz, though it possessed more trade: “All the merchants who come from the land of Christians, from Kaffa, and Trebizond, and the merchants of Turkey and Syria, come every year, at this time, to the city of Sultanieh, to make their purchases”.³⁷ Italian merchants continued to buy and export a huge quantity of raw silk and silk fabrics to Europe from major sales markets in the East. In 1395 alone, Venetian merchants exported 175,000 *ducats* worth of silk.³⁸ Tabriz preserved its significance as a major

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 89-90

³⁵ H. İnalçık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, p. 274

³⁶ I.P.Petrushevskiy. Gosudarstva Azerbajjana v XV veke, p. 195

³⁷ Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, pp. 91-93

³⁸ J.Day. The Levant Trade in the Middle Ages, p. 814

hub of international trade and handicraft center for a long time, so that an anonymous Venetian merchant who visited the Safavid State in the early 16th century wrote about it: “There is much traffic in this city, and there are silks of every quality, raw and manufactured. There are rhubarb, musk, ultramarine blue, pearls of Orimes (Ormuz) of every water, coins of all sorts, lake dye of great beauty, fine indigo, woolen and other cloths from Aleppo, Bursa, and Constantinople, since crimson silks are exported from Tauris (Tabriz) to Aleppo and Turkey, and are paid for in cloth and silver”.³⁹

Meanwhile, a new Ottoman State began flourishing in the west of Asia Minor. The growing might of the Ottoman arms was conducive to the internal stability of the state, while its suitable location and access to the Aegean and Mediterranean contributed to the transformation of Bursa, the first Ottoman capital, into the largest silk and related wares center in the 15th century. Although, in the period under consideration, the silk was brought to Bursa mostly from Tabriz, Trebizond and Aleppo, nevertheless, the trade in raw silk between the Ottoman State and Arab countries was quite limited, since the main suppliers of this product to the Ottoman markets were Azerbaijan and Persia.⁴⁰

There were two main caravan routes linking Tabriz and Bursa. The first of them crossed Mardin – Diyarbakır – Maraş – Kayseri – Ankara – Eskişehir, and then reached Bursa. The second one was Tabriz – Erzurum – Erzincan – Tokat – Amasya – Ankara – Bursa.⁴¹ Thus, both of these routes crossed towns of Eastern and Central Anatolia that accounted for their transformation into major centers of production and international transit trade.

Although the leading city in the Anatolian silk production and weaving industry was Bursa, there were other silk manufacturing centers in Asia Minor, such as Amasya. This city was situated on the trade route from Tabriz to Bursa, and was quite close to the Black Sea ports. It offered suitable climatic conditions for silk worms to be brought up and became a city whose silk was second only in demand to that of Bursa.⁴² Silk textiles were also manufactured in Mardin, Diyarbakır and other cities in eastern Anatolia.

However, as stated above, the best known center for the manufacturing and marketing of silk products for Europe in the 15th century was Bursa. The total cost of the silk imported from Azerbaijan and Persia to Bursa in 1479 reached 150.000 *ducats*.⁴³ A considerable proportion of the traders who in the second half of the 15th century supplied silk and silk textiles to the Bursa markets were merchants from Azerbaijan, mostly from Tabriz, Shamakhi, Chukur-Saad, and rarely from cities in Persia such as from Gilan, Yezd, Shiraz, Isfahan, and

³⁹ A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia, p.173

⁴⁰ H.Inalcık. Bursa and the Commerce of the Levant, p. 136

⁴¹ F.Dalsar. Türk Sanayi ve Ticaret Tarihinde Bursa’da İpekçilik, pp. 128-129

⁴² See: İ.Kıvrım, S.Elmacı. Osmanlı döneminde Amasya’da ipekçilik, pp. 715-728

⁴³ H.Inalcık. Bursa, p. 448

Kashan, etc. This is according to data from the most informative and reliable source on the subject – the registers of the local Muslim judges (*Kadı sicilleri*). For example, one of these documents states that the property, mainly silk, of a certain Haji Abd ar-Rahman, merchant from Shamakhi, who died in the 1467-68 in Bursa, was estimated at more than 220,000 *akçe* (or more than 4.000 golden *ducats*). The total weight of silk left by him exceeded 1.400 kg.⁴⁴

Most of this raw material was processed on local looms, which belonged mainly to private owners.⁴⁵ For better regulation of economic life in Bursa, Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) issued in 1502 the Law on Accountability (*Kanunname-i ihtisab-ı Bursa*), according to which about 1,000 active looms were available at that time in Bursa, used by local artisans for producing several types of silk fabrics: *kemha* (damask), *kemha gülistani* (damask gulistani), *kadife* (velvet), *vale* (tulle), *çifte tafta* (double twisted woven taffeta), *yek tafta* (single twisted woven taffeta), *atlas-i şehri* (urban atlas), *sultani kırmızı* (royal red), *meftun*, *bürümcük*, *mezkeb*, *beledi*, *karabuğra futa*, *karyağdı*, *zerduzi* and others. The document also set technological standards for manufacturing each type of fabric and prescribed a detailed procedure for their coloring, with a list of types of dyes, their exact ratio, etc.⁴⁶ The relevant sources provide information on the production of some other kinds of silk textiles in Bursa – *abai*, *ağbani*, *brokar*, *bürümcük*, *çatma*, *diba*, etc.⁴⁷

A significant part of the silk production in Bursa was bought by merchants from Florence, Genoa and Venice, who keenly competed with each other. A common form of commercial transaction between local producers and Italian merchants was the exchange (barter) of European woolen fabrics for local silk ones. For instance, according to the court registers of Bursa in 1478, one Florentine dealer, named Piero, exchanged European textiles that cost about 4 thousand *ducats* (207.920 *akçe*), for raw silk, with four Muslim merchants.⁴⁸ It should be noted that in 1501, Giovanni di Francesco Maringhi, a representative of the Florentine commercial companies of the Venturi, Medici, Galilei and Michelozzi in Pera (Istanbul), stated that one package (*yük*) of silk could bring a revenue up to 70-80 *ducats*.⁴⁹ The silk delivered from Azerbaijan and Persia to Bursa was likely to meet demand for the product in European countries. A testimony to the large-scale trade in the silk at that period was that in 1487 taxes on silk-weighing in Bursa amounted to 6 million *akçe*, whereas by 1507 this figure was 5.45 million *akçe*.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ H.İnalcık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, pp. 276-279

⁴⁵ H.İnalcık. Bursa, p. 448

⁴⁶ A.A.Yanar, M.Arlı. Kanunname-i İhtisab-ı Bursa, pp. 62-63

⁴⁷ A.Aytaç. Osmanlı dönemi'nde Bursa ipekçiliği, dokumacılık ve bazı arşiv belgeleri, pp. 5-6

⁴⁸ H.İnalcık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, pp. 289-290

⁴⁹ H.İnalcık. Bursa, p. 448

⁵⁰ H.İnalcık. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun ekonomik ve sosyal tarihi, p. 278

We can estimate the European merchants' approximate income from trading silk transported through the cities of Asia Minor, based on the commercial operations and the route followed by the English negotiant Newbery. In 1581-82 Newbery traveled with a cargo of raw silk from Kashan to Bursa, along the traditional trade route, passing through Tabriz, Revan, Erzurum, Erzincan, and Tokat. Calculations based on his notes indicate that his travel expenses for each camel package (*deve yükü*) of silk, including customs charges at different points, came to 30-35 *kuruş* (or 3.120-3.640 Ottoman *akçe*). Considering that in 1581 a package of silk in Bursa was worth 54.675-60.750 *akçe*, the travel costs for such a long journey amounted to no more than 6% of the total value of the goods. Even if we take into account that Newbery had additional expenses such as security costs, bribes, and import duties, etc., it still turns out that the silk trade was quite beneficial, since the selling price of Persian silk in the Levantine markets was at least twice its purchase price.⁵¹

In addition, intensive silk and other commodities transit along caravan routes of Asia Minor predetermined the occurrence of historical events in the region, since the desire to gain control over these routes often led to military clashes between various states. The offensive policy of the Ottomans in Asia Minor in the late 14th century led to the conquest of some Anatolian Turkic principalities, followed by the retaliatory campaign of Tamerlane westwards and the defeat of the Ottomans in 1402 in the battle of Ankara, the conquest of Trebizond Empire in 1461 by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed Fatih (1451-1381), and wars between the Ottomans and the Aqqoyunlu and Safavid states in the 15th-16th centuries. These all represented a fierce struggle for control over the international trade routes.

In the second half of the 15th century, a greater portion of Eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan and Persia, was a part of the Aqqoyunlu realm, with Tabriz as its capital. According to some Muslim sources, the well-known ruler Uzun Hasan (1453-1478) issued a series of legislative codes or statutes (*Kanunname*) to regulate taxation procedures in trade, handicrafts, agriculture, and nomadic cattle-breeding in various regions of the state. Apparently the results of the law-giving activity of this ruler far outlived his military deeds in the memory of the peoples of the Near East, such that some Persian historians in the 16th century pointed out that regulations in financial and fiscal matters (*der estefa-ye mal-o-hoquq-e divani qanun est*) established by Uzun Hasan and remained in force for a long time after his death.⁵² Even in the early 18th century, distribution of taxes to replenish the treasury of the Safavid court in Isfahan complied with Uzun Hasan's laws.⁵³ In fact the Ottoman government kept on applying his directions for some time in the eastern provinces of Asia Minor.

However, no original text of the statutes has survived. The only reliable source on the law-

⁵¹ N.Alkan. 15 ve 16 yüzyıllarda İran İpek Yolu'nda kervanlar, p. 147

⁵² Lubb al-Tavarikh, p. 249; Minorsky V. The Aqqoyunlu and Land Reforms, p. 449

⁵³ Tadhkirat al-Muluk, p. 96

making activity of Uzun Hasan is found in the Ottoman legislative codes of the eastern provinces of Asia Minor. Early in the 16th century the Aqqoyunlu state was routed by Shah Ismail I (1501-1524) and its territory was captured by the Safavids. A war between the Ottomans and the Safavids followed, with the latter being defeated, and in 1515-17 the eastern provinces of Asia Minor formed part of the Ottoman Empire.

Meanwhile, the Ottoman administration continued to apply the laws of Uzun Hasan regarding fiscal matters with a few exceptions. An independent statute was drawn up for each province in 1516 and 1518. All these statutes commenced with a phrase stating that their content was in compliance with the laws of Uzun Hasan (*ber muceb-i kanun-i Hasan Padişah*). A considerable part of the statutes contained clauses related to trade. The documents provide important information about the structure of international transit trade and the range of commodities being transported along the caravan routes of Eastern Anatolia in the 15th-16th centuries. Various cloths manufactured both in the East and Europe, along with dyes, spices, slaves, metals, oil, and glassware formed the basis of this trade, and silk and related textiles took priority in the list.

Silk remained one of the most taxable items enriching the Aqqoyunlu treasury. It was no mere coincidence that lists of market and customs fees in all the statutes commenced with the silk and related fabric. The main taxes levied from the silk were different types of *bac* (*baj*) and *tamga*. *Bac* was a customs or road charge for transit traffic, while *tamga* was levied at the specific market place where the silk was sold. -Nearly all the statutes of eastern provinces in Asia Minor refer to silk and related textiles taxation. In order to get an idea of gains from customs fees (*bac*) on the silk and related textiles, it is instructive to cite an example from a statute of Mardin province. This states that if a caravan of raw silk went through Mardin, a package of silk or *yük* (approx. 162 kg) was charged (*bac-i ubur*) to the amount of 300 *akçe*; next came a tax in favor of a treasurer (*adet-i hazinedari*) to the amount of 60 *akçe*; furthermore, there was a tax in favor of the customs scribe (*resm-i kitabet*) to the amount of 6 *akçe*, as well as a road fee (*noktabaşı* or *dihdarlık*) amounting to 6 *akçe*. If textiles, silk included, were transported from Yezd in Persia (*Yezdi akmişe*), from Europe (*Firengi akmişe*), or Anatolia (*Rum kumaşı*), *bac* could amount to as much as one and half times that for raw silk; fabrics from Aleppo (*Haleb kumaşı*), Damascus (*Şam kumaşı*), and Egypt (*Mısır kumaşı*) – amounted to 100 *akçe*. The statute made a special provision that customs officials were prohibited to unpack cargoes and levy taxes in the form of fabric, though to all appearances, this was often practiced. Thus, customs charges per package of raw silk in Mardin amounted to a considerable sum – above 370 *akçe* per package. It should be noted that Mardin was one of the centers of silk fabric manufacture, mainly tulle (*vale*) and that this manufacture was fully dependent on the import of raw silk. A statute of Mardin specified that more than 1 *akçe* was charged from artisans per loom for silk fabric.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ö.L.Barkan. Kanunlar, p. 159

It has also to be kept in mind that customs tariffs were levied in the main towns of eastern Anatolia, as witnessed by various statutes. Thus, according to a statute of Erzincan province, transit of raw silk was charged on the basis of five types of customs tariffs amounting to more than 30 *akçe*. Twenty seven *akçe* was charged for each *batman* of raw silk that passed through Erzincan. This tax was formed from a combination of two customs duties – Kemah (*Kemah bacı*) and Erzincan (*Erzincan bacı*). The city applied measures of weight such as the “*batman of Hasan Padishah*” (or Uzun Hasan), which was approximately 6 kg. Another 2 *akçe* was charged upon the silk merchants for additional costs, which were also formed from several taxes and had different names – *tamga-yi siyah* (black *tamga*), *hakk-ul-kalem* (pen right), and *resm-i kabızane*. Negotiants had to pay also as a separate duty, a so-called “road tax” (*rahdarlık*), in the amount of 2 *akçe* per package of silk. It is noteworthy that Turkmans (*Terakime taifesi*) were also actively involved in the transportation and trade of silk, for which the statute of Erzincan contains a separate article with the indication of all taxes levied. Although the names of these taxes are identical to the above mentioned ones, however, their size in monetary terms has significant differences.⁵⁵

According to the law of Uzun Hasan Aqqoyunlu certain fees were also charged on silk in one of the largest cities in Eastern Anatolia – Diyarbakır (Amid). Thus, foreign traders who bagged raw silk through the city and did not sell it there, had to pay a fee (*bac-i harir*) of 16 *akçe* for each *batman* of Amid, equal to about 5 kg. Then they paid an additional fee called “*bac* of Ergani” of 4 *akçe*. The same fees were paid by foreign merchants for the transportation of certain types of tissue.⁵⁶ Thus, the customs duties on silk and silk products in Diyarbakır were not so high compared to other cities. In comparison, in Harput the customs service charged 33 *akçe* for each “*men (batman)* of Harput” of silk, equal to about 5.7 kg.⁵⁷

Analysis of the statutes and their comparison with authentic historical information indicates that initial prices of silk rose as a result of the application of reiterated customs tariffs until it reached the major consumer markets in Europe.

As already identified, where commodities, including silk, were sold at a local market, another tariff – *tamga* – was levied from traders. A statute of Amid province states that if the silk was not sold in the town, *bac-i harir* (customs duty) was charged, otherwise *tamga* on the rate of 5% was levied.⁵⁸ It should be noted that it was the Mongols who introduced *tamga* into the social and economic life of the medieval Near East and that this was practiced in many Chingizid and post-Chingizid states. V.V.Barthold considered *tamga* to be a sort of income tax

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 182-183

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 146

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 146

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 146

taken from all merchants and artisans in the cities.⁵⁹ This was harshly criticized by adherents of Muslim law (*Shari'a*), so Muslim orthodoxies considered it to be pleasing to God for any ruler to abolish *tamga*. However, since *tamga* provided a means for the nomadic elite to reap profits from trade, it was natural that the nobility always opposed its cancellation. Indeed, Uzun Hasan, as an Arab author al-Giyathi reports, intended to abolish *tamga* everywhere, but the nobles disagreed. Therefore he had to preserve it, though he cut it to half the size that it had been under previous rulers.⁶⁰ The statute data reaffirms the Arab source information.

To conclude, it would be appropriate to note that caravan routes crossing the territories of the eastern provinces of Asia Minor were essentially a part of ancient Silk Road, despite the fact that after the disintegration of the Mongol Empire, especially in the 15th – early 16th centuries, it began to lose its previous significance. However, Chinese silk, and then silk from Azerbaijan and Persia replenished the European markets and silk remained an important item of commerce between the East and the West. This is reflected not only in the narrative sources and travel notes of western travelers, but also in numerous documents, including the statutes of Eastern Anatolian provinces. The strict and precise regulation of customs duties and market taxes related to silk in the legislation of Uzun Hasan suggests that it brought significant income to the treasury of the Aqqoyunlu State. The desire for control over the caravan routes, along which the silk of Azerbaijan and Persia was delivered through cities of Asia Minor to the ports on the Black and Mediterranean Seas, determined the nature of relations between the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and the Anatolian principalities, the states of Aqqoyunlu and Safavids, on the other side. Targeted expansion of the Ottoman Empire to the east, aimed at mastery of the main centers of silk production, as well as ways of transporting them to the west was caused by this strategic vision.

As a whole, a considerable proportion of international caravan routes, as in the period of the Turkic Kaganate, remained under the control of the Turkic-Mongol states in the 15th-16th centuries. Both the nomadic elites of these states and the settled population were equally interested in the normal operation of these routes and the rise of trade. This was an important factor leading to the gradual elimination of extremes in each other's perception and rapprochement of the legal rights of the nomadic and settled population. It is in this context that accounts for the statutes of Uzun Hasan, which like Chingiz Khan's Law, were titled *Yasa*. Also noteworthy is the fact that while the Chingiz Khan's *Yasa* clearly proclaimed the advantages of the nomadic mode of life in the 13th century, the Uzun Hasan's statutes in the 15th century were designed to equally protect the interests of the settled population as well.

⁵⁹ V.V.Bartol'd. *Persidskaya nadpis' na stene Aniyskoy mecheti Manuche*, p. 332. See also: R.Yu.Pochekaev. *Tamgha and the struggle against it*, pp. 77-94

⁶⁰ Minorsky V. *The Aqqoyunlu and Land Reforms*, p. 450

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