

INFLUENCE OF SHIRVANSHAH STATE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS IN AZERBAIJAN

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The historic destinies of Azerbaijan are mostly bound up with the Caspian Sea. Already in XII Century State of Shirvanshah established naval fleet in the Caspian Sea in order to defend country from the sea. The component part of Armed Forces – Fleet took an active part in repulsing attacks to the country from the sea though in X – XII centuries the fleet consisted of several scores of ships. It had been investigated that the most striking trace in the history of Naval Affairs in Azerbaijan was left in 1175 when pirates tried to invade Shirvan from the river Volga. Also conceptions of different historians concerning the first information about the Caspian Sea, as well as the people inhabited the coastal area of this sea appear in this article.

Key words: *defensive system, naval affairs.*

1. INFLUENCE OF SHIRVANSHAH STATE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS IN AZERBAIJAN

During the period of entering of Azerbaijan into Arabic caliphate in the VII and first half of the IX century the Arabs, having blown up Byzantines' trade pathways, turned trade pathways eastward to the Caspian Sea, which in its turn promoted rapid flourishing of cities in by Caspian countries. Arabs took over the whole Caspian-Volga trade way, which till that time was under Byzantine control. The Khazars were defeated by the Arabs and

were not representing any serious danger for new trade pathway. All ports on the Caspian Sea were under Arabian surveillance and according to Ibn Haukal “were often visited by merchant ships which sailed from one port to another” [1, t. 1].

With the appearance of independent Azerbaijani feudal states in the IX-X centuries, especially with reinforcement of the Shirvanshah state in the X-XIII centuries, naval affairs in Azerbaijan passed to the new development stage.

It would be worth noting the fact that military organization of Shirvanshah Mazyadids had rather complex structure since

military affairs had centuries-old tradition here and innovations only complemented but did not change the existing military system. The Army consisted of constant troops that were Shirvanshah Guards and armed militiamen, rulers of the areas and large feudals, mobilized in case of war. The Regular army consisted of cavalry and infantries. The troops were under the leadership of “sarlashkar” (Persian) which in peacetime had subordinates like regular troops - “asker” (Arabian) and local “dun” (Arabian), as well as palace guards - “gulams” and engineering units [2, p. 149].

The important component of Shirvanshah armed forces was the fleet consisting of tens of ships, which in the X - XII centuries took active part in the repulse of attacks to the country from the sea. The Azerbaijani fleet strengthened particularly in the XII century during the reign of shirvanshah Ahistan I (1160-1196). In 1175 Ahsitan I defeated the Russian fleet near Baku. He destroyed 73 ships with the support of Georgian tsar George III, and occupied Shabran and Derbent, which had been captured by the kipchaks the day before [3, p. 141].

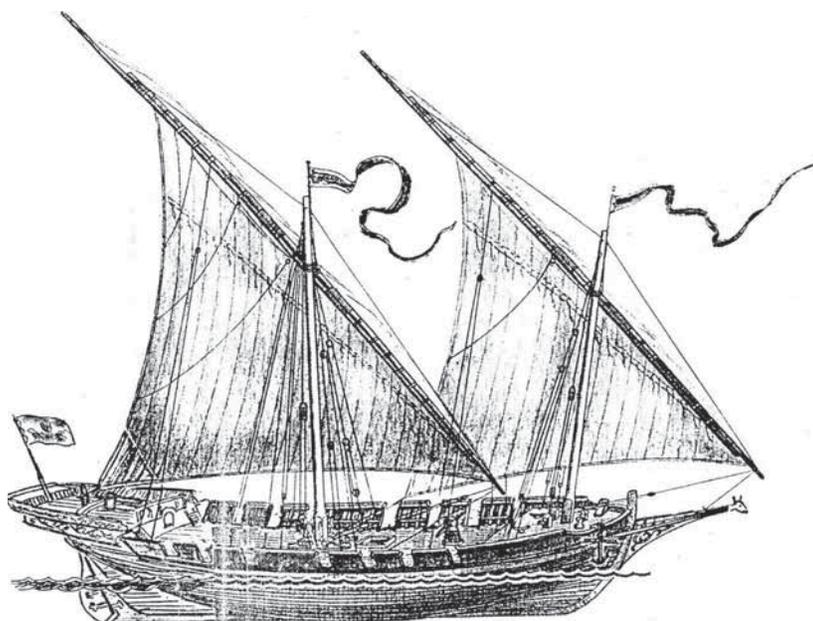


Fig. no. 1. “Shebeke” – military ship of Shirvanshahlar’s state (XII-XIII c)
(S. Ahmedov’s reconstruction)

Shirvanshahs paid special attention to the building of military fortifications, especially, for the reason to secure the seaside from the sea attacks. From the X century the role of Baku commenced considerably to increase. Mukaddasi (985 year) wrote that “Baku on the sea – is the only harbor of the area” [4, p. 70]. “Ships also sail on it (i.e. the Caspian - the author) moving between the places which we mention on the south seaside to Baku, where mines (the sources) of white oil and other (minerals) are” – noted another Arabic author al-Masudi in the X century [5, p. 201, 202]. In the result of Shemahi earthquake in 1192, the importance of Baku increased, and aftermath it became the capital of the Shirvanshah state.

Exactly in this period, according to the great Azerbaijani poet of the XII century Khagani, Baku changes into the large port and the center of the international transit trade on the Caspian Sea. As a whole in the XI-XII centuries and later the world trade, linking Azerbaijan with India and China, was realized on the south land pathway through Central Asia to Iran, the south areas of Azerbaijan and on the north road, along the Caspian Sea coast past Derbent passage to the Khazars' country and further. This was the nearest way from Absheron [4, p. 112, 113]. It is noteworthy that the level of the Caspian Sea before

the end of the XIII century was low and the seashore was much larger than the present one. During the reign of Shirvanshah Fariburz III (1225-1243) on one of the islands near Baku the Sabail sea fortress was built as a naval installation of Shirvanshah fleet. The road uniting the fortress with the land was consolidated by a long stonewall. Its construction was done under supervision of Azerbaijani architect Zaynaddin Abu Rashid. Having the wrong shape the fortress strongly extended rectangle measuring 180 m to 40 m, had strong walls consolidated by 15 towers. The 4 largest of them had cylindrical form and were set out on the corners of the fortress. One of them - bonjon tower was the largest. The rest 11 intermediate towers had the shape of a semicircle. Their small diameter did not allow to place into each of them more than one or two shots that enabled to lead the fire in only one direction. This defect of the defense was compensated by frequent loopholes and merlons in the walls, which were to provide sufficient density of the fire. The narrow fold between this fortress and the small fortification in the place of the modern ship-repairing plant was closed by chain. However, this fortress as well as the whole coastal part of Baku was flooded together with the connecting wall as the result of a strong earthquake [6, p. 92, 93].

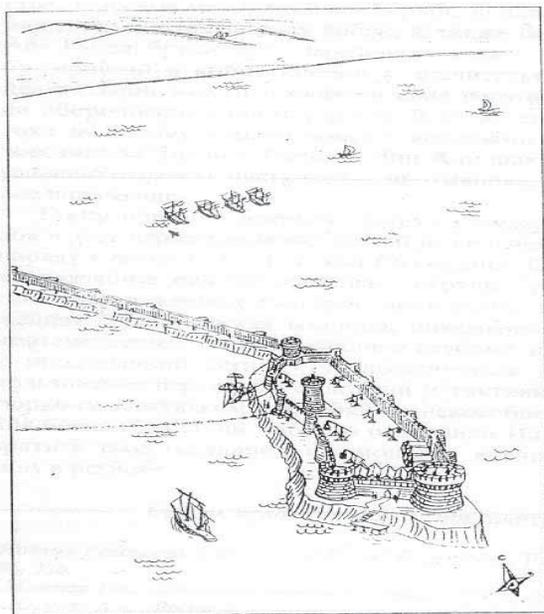


Fig. no. 2. *Military naval fortress of Sabail (XIII c)*
(S.A. Ahmedov's reconstruction)

The first Baku fortress, built on a high hill in the first half of the XII century during the reign of Manuchehr III (1120-1160), had a tower type citadel inside of approximately 20 m height, but outside it had the shape of a tetragon [2, p. 178; 9, p. 128].

The important element in the defensive system of Baku in this period was Giz Galasi (Maiden tower), built according to Azerbaijani scientist: S.B. Ashurbeyli - in the first century B.C., to M.A. Nabieva - in the VI century B.C., but according to the version of the historian of Azerbaijani architecture L. Bretanichki in two stages: the V-VI centuries and the XII century. This powerful building

28 m high and with walls 4-5 m wide was the defensive tower both from the sea and the land [14, p. 151].

The legend about “Caspian Atlantida” is connected with this period. There are evidences of Medieval authors such as Bakuvi, Shirvani, Nadzhaty and others about flooding of several Azerbaijan coastal cities as the result of the sea level rising. Western travelers stated this phenomenon too. So Venetian traveler Marino Sled (1320) had an inscription on his map beside the western Caspian seaside: “Every year sea comes one palm forward and a lot of good cities are flooded” [7]. As far back as in 1844 the

prominent Azerbaijani encyclopedist A. Bakikhanov tried to find the flooded city of Yunan-sheheri ("Greek city") by means of two sailing vessels [7]. By efforts of Azerbaijani archeologist-submariners in 60-70s of last century, both under water and at the seaside, lots of historical monuments were revealed on islands and undersea shoals and even historical area of Shirvan - Gushtasfi of the early XIV century turned out to be under water with its cities and villages, occupying extensive zone in the estuary of the Kura. Archeological monuments - Byandovan I and Byandovan II towns were fixed on ancient riverbeds of the Kura and beside the seaside. Medieval (the XII-XIII centuries) Gushtasfi city localizes with the former, but with the latter - Mugan city (the IX-XII centuries), which possibly were also coastal ports on the Caspian [8]. Undersea researches in water areas of Sangi-Mugan Island (Svinoy) revealed that this island was one of the shelters of the medieval seafarers on the Caspian Sea [9, p. 82, 83]. Another seaport was situated beside Amburan cape (Bilgah village) at the north Absheron seaside, where archeologists discovered under water stone anchors of medieval ships, sailing on the Caspian Sea [8].

The construction of maritime military-fortification buildings in

Derbent and Absheron, and first of all in Baku, were dictated by exigency of protection of the seaside from repeated attacks of the Vikings and the Russians, which began even since the end of the IX century. Beginning with the IX century it was customary for the Russians to sail on the Caspian Sea. Ibn Hordadbek (the IX century), Ibn Fakih (the X century), Ibn Fadlan (the X century) wrote about this. Ibn Hordadbek in his "The book of routes and states" (840-850) wrote that Slavonic merchants "went to the Dzhurdzhan Sea (i.e. the Caspian) and moored to any coast there" [10, p. 3].

There are two stages in the history of the Russians' marches to the Caspian Sea and to the South Caucasus. During the first one – up to the middle of the X century - they were undertaken for trade and only sometimes they carried military character. But from the middle of the X century Russians sought to settle down firmly in the west by Caspian area.

At the end of the IX century and especially during the X century besides peaceful trade sails, the Russians performed several great military campaigns on the Caspian Sea. Densely populated southwestern Caspian seaside attracted foreign conquerors from time immemorial. Russian merchants who reached the shores of the Caspian Sea on their ships were well aware of the wealth

of these areas of Azerbaijan [11, p. 92]. This explains predatory nature of these campaigns.

The first of the great campaigns took place in 880, when the Russians attacked Abeskoon (the island, located in Astrabad gulf near the southern coast of the Caspian Sea), however in struggle with Hasan ibn Zeyd they suffered a defeat [12, p. 36]. In 909 they repeated their raid to Abeskoon, having sailed up here on 16 ships. However, soon they were exiled again. Next year during another raid the Russians were defeated by shirvanshah Ali ibn Haysam's fleet [13, p. 98]. It proves that in this period shirvanshahs already had their fleet on the Caspian Sea. In their turn the Russians had one-wood ships in which rowlocks, oars, masts, yards and sails were installed. During the sails they always tried to keep close to the shores. [13, p. 99].

The greatest Russian campaign of this period took place in 912-913 years. During the campaign the Russians sailed from the estuaries of the Dnepr to the estuaries of the Don via the Black and the Azov Seas. Then they dragged their rooks across the land to the Volga and came down to the Caspian Sea. Their fleet consisted of 500 ships and there

were 100 men on each of them. As Masudi noted in his work "the folks living on the coasts of this sea were confused since in former times they had never seen the enemy approaching them by the sea and only merchants' and fishermans' ships were sailing on the sea" [3, p. 76]. In the course of this march, after completion of the attacks on the southern Caspian seaside, the Russians attacked Baku seaside as well, having probably disembarked on Beyuk-Zira Island. Shirvanshah Ali ibn Haysam, having armed his forces, sent them on barges and small trade ships to neighboring Baku islands. However, the Russians, whose ships were of higher quality, managed to split shirvans, while thousands of them were killed and sunk. According to Masudi, the Russians remained on this sea for several months and navigation was stopped due to occupation of the islands near Absheron by the Russians and danger of attacks on trade ships. Having seized rich prey in Absheron, the Russians returned then to Khazar region, to the estuary of the Volga and to the North Caucasus, where they were attacked by Moslems. Though the Khazars did not have any ships, they managed to lure the Russians from

the sea and after three-days battle the Russians suffered a heavy defeat. Only insignificant part of them was able to return to their native land [4, p. 62, 63; 2, p. 160, 161].

The greatest of all the Russians campaigns on the Caspian Sea was in 943-944 and was described by Ibn Moskaveykh ("The book of peoples'

ordeals"), by Yakut ("Geographical dictionary"), by Abu-Faradzhi ("Syrian chronicle"), by Abuli-Fedoy ("Moslem chronicle"), by Ibn Al-Asirom ("Full chronicle") and by the great Azerbaijani poet Nizami Gyandzhevi ("Iskendername").



The Russian flotilla, having left the estuaries of the Dnepr, sailed to the Don via the Black Sea and the Kerch strait, and then having gone up the river, it was portaged to the Volga and finally sailed to the Caspian Sea. As soon as Russians reached the estuary of the Kura, they went up the river on their vessels to Mubarek village situated not far from Barda, where they moored their fleet. On 24 August 944 they began the siege of Barda. As a result of the assault

the Russian forces, vastly exceeding in quantity, occupied Barda [14, p. 11]. It is worth noting the fact that unlike the previous marches, bearing obviously predatory character, this march of the Russians pursued the object of creation in the South Caucasus, on the banks of the Kura with the center in Barda, the analogue of the political formation, which was created by them in Tamana, beside the estuary of the Kuban with the center in Tmutarakani [12, p. 56].



**Military campaign to Barda:
In 987 (17 vessels)
In 1030 (38 ships)**

Campaign of Russians to the Caspian Sea, the battle for city Barda, the 943-944s, a painter – N.M. Kochergin, 1948.

However, the Russians did not manage to consolidate in Barda. After several bloody battles with the troops of Marzuban ibn Muhammed from Salarid dynasty, during which the Russians had heavy casualties, and because of the epidemic that began in their camp, the Russians urgently left Barda on 12 August 945 [2, p. 163]. The next attempt to penetrate into Barda through the estuary of the Kura the Russians made in 987, when they appeared again on 17 vessels near the estuary of the Kura. However, because of stubborn resistance, shown by local inhabitants, they did not manage to stay here for a long time [2, p. 163, 164].

Several decades later in 1030 the Russians appeared again on the

Caspian Sea, having attacked Shirvan on 38 ships. Shirvanshah Manuchehr I (1027-1034) met them with his troops near Baku. In this battle shirvans underwent heavy losses but the Russians went up the Kura and reached the Arax. Shirvanshah tried to stop the advance of the Russians along the river, having dammed the Arax, but unsuccessfully. Nevertheless, stubborn resistance of shirvans prevented their further advancement on the Arax. Meanwhile the ruler of Ganja Sheddadid Musa ibn Fadl hired the Russians and used them for suppression of the rebellion in Beylagan. After this the Russians left the territory of Arran and went to Byzantium. Then they returned to their native land [5, p. 54]. In 1031 the Russians again appeared near Baku,

but this time they were defeated by the ruler of Arran Abulfat Musa ibn Fadl. Moreover, the biggest part of them was annihilated. In 1032 the campaign of Savir, Alan and Russian joint forces against Shirvan took place, however on their way back they were smashed by Derbent emir Mansur. Only a small detachment of the Alans managed to escape [2, p. 164].

It would be worth to accentuate the appearance of the eastern Normans “Varangians” on the Caspian Sea, where they got, sailing on the Baltic Sea - Riga bay – the western Dvina-the Dnepr-the Volga route, penetrating then into the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea [15, t. 14; 16, p. 440-442]. There is a lot of information about Albania and the Caspian (the Girkansk) Sea in ancient scandinavian treatises and the XII-XIV century maps, made on basis of Vikings’ practical experience [17, p. 35, 41, 69, 123; 18, p. 36].

The year of 1175 left the brightest trace in the history of naval affairs in Azerbaijan. This year pirates-wanderers from the Volga tried to invade Shirvan. They crossed the Caspian Sea on 73 ships and, having dropped anchor near island Ruinas (Sari), went up the Kura to Lemberana. At the same time, the kipchaks occupied Derbent and, having proceeded to the south, occupied citadel Shabran. However,

the kipchaks were soon defeated by allied georgian-shirvanshah troops. On the sea the Azerbaijani fleet, created by efforts of shirvanshah Ahsitan I, defeated the fleet of the strangers. All these events found their poetical reflection in victorious odes of Hagani, devoted to Ahsitan I [1, p. 163; 19, p. 528-530]:

Hakan-and kabir Abu-l-Muzaffer became the first among the conquerors.

His sword got help of the heavens during the conquest of Derbent and Shabran.

Your victory over pecheneq troops (the Russians) became the era for those,

Who are elevated like the heaven (i.e. for other sovereigns).

One of your arrows completely destroyed 73 ships

Like prophet Hidru.

After these remarkable events, marches of the Russians against Shirvan practically finished. Concerning the further development of naval affairs in Azerbaijan, Mongolian invasion at the beginning of the XIII century negatively influenced upon this process since economic development of the country was hampered. Meantime from the end of the XIII century international sea trade through the Caspian Sea got great importance. Here appeared Genoese and Venetian merchants, whose ships sailed on the Caspian

Sea, and on the shores of which they founded their own trading posts [3, p. 118]. Commodity-money relations developing in the XIV century in northern Italy generated trade and political competition of two Italian

cities, and their fight for super-profits of "Oversea trade" defined the appearance of Italian merchants, missionaries and pirates in the Near East, the Caucasus and on the Caspian Sea.

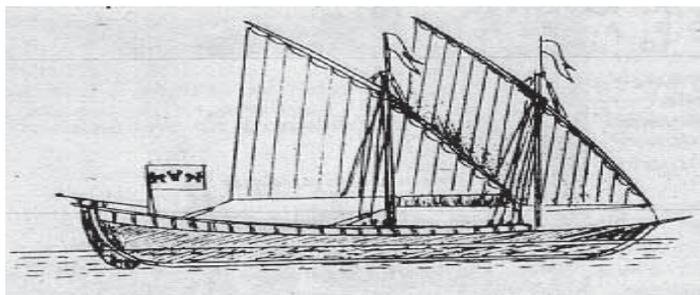


Fig. no.3. Azerbaijani ship. 14 century

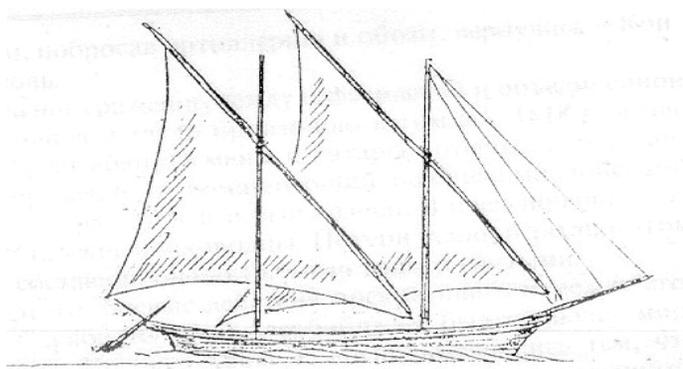


Fig. no.4. «Fish». On A. Kontarin's information,
S.A. Ahmadov's reconstruction (15 c.)

It is also worth noting the fact that in Western Europe there was enough detailed information about the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan, for instance, in the works of William Rubric (1215-1270), Mark Polo (the XIII century), Klaviho, Kontranini, Barbara (the XV century), Pavel Ioviya, Anthony Jankinson (the XVI century), A. Oleariya, Y. Streys (the

XVII century) and many others. In particular, Klaviho noted, "There is the Baku Sea which is situated in the middle of the land and has no connections with other seas" [20, p. 58]. Yan Streys indicated that "On the Caspian Sea it is better to sail on a flat boat with the capacity of 40 to 50 seats, ships of bigger size and having deeper draught cannot pass

everywhere” [20, p. 301]. Describing his voyage on the Caspian Sea Hristofer Berrow, an employee of English trade company, mentioned

anchorage Bildi (Bilgah) not far from Baku where he was in 1580 [21, p. 161].

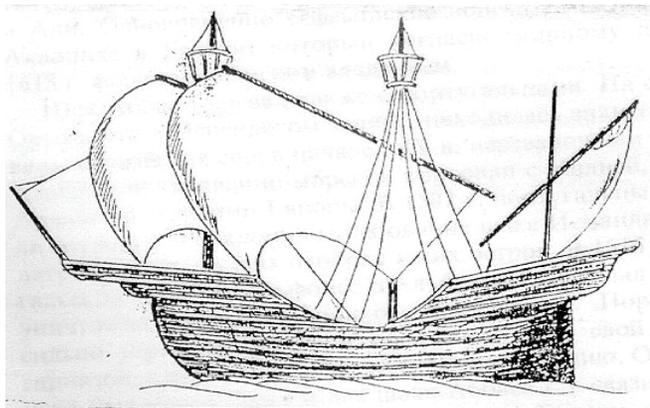


Fig. no. 5. «Bousse». On A. Контарин's information, S.A. Ahmadov's reconstruction (15 c.)

The importance of Baku as a significant port was noted in old-time Catalan atlas, formed in 1375. The Caspian Sea here was called the Baku Sea and the Sarra Sea. Cape Preala, which is recognized as present Pirallahi Island, was noted there too. This proves that the Catalans, famous as good seafarers, sailed on the Caspian Sea for trade purposes and they were well aware of the whole Caspian seaside, including Baku [4, p. 118]. Mark Polo testifies that already in the XIII century Genoese merchants sailed on the Caspian Sea on the ships that were basically dealing with silk [21, p. 33].

Baku kept its importance of a leading port city on the Caspian

Sea even later, in the second half of the XV century, when Derbent had already lost its past importance as a port. The importance of Baku as the largest seaport is also obvious from the fact that beginning from the XV century different medieval authors marked the Caspian Sea as “the Baku Sea” - “mare di Bachu”, “mare di Bachau”, “mare di Baccu”. The Venetian traveler of the end of the XV century Andzhonello called Baku a beautiful harbor on the Caspian Sea, used as a port for Tabriz. The contemporary of Andzhonello Donato da Leze noted that Baku “is a city, where big trade is carried on and for this reason it is identified as the Baku Sea. Here spices (brought here

from India - author) are shipped and carried to Astrakhan, a Tatar city on the river Volga” [22, p. 120].

The foreign travelers also noted the fact that the city was strongly fortified from the side of the sea. Kempfer, having visited Baku in 1683, wrote that “near the sea double walls of the city were built, opposite to open sea and stretched further into the sea as if parallel to the coast. The roadstead is closed from choppiness by the opposite cape, which lies about half crossing off the shore. Ships arriving from Russia, Dagestan, Circassia, Uzbekistan and Persia find a comfortable anchorage here” [4, p. 252]. Pretty valuable information about Baku and coastal regions of Shirvan is also contained in the records of Russian travelers, merchants and diplomats of the XV-XVI centuries, especially Afanasy Nikitin (the middle of the XV century), F. Kotov (the XVII century) and others [23, p. 69, 70, 144; 4, p. 44, 45, 221-231].

Another important anchorage port on Absheron was Bildi (Bilgah), which functioned during several centuries (the XVI-XVIII centuries). This fact is proved by archeological finds of goods from sunken ships, by discoveries of metallic anchors and anchor stones [24, p. 136].

As a whole, beginning from the middle of the XV century the

Caspian region, through which lay main caravan routes, connecting India, China and Central Asia with the basins of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, as well as Persian Gulf with khanates situated on the Volga and the Moscow state, began to play one of the key roles in Asia-Europe world trade. Moreover, from beginning of the XVI century Baku, the largest port on the Caspian Sea, played the most important role in this trade. The main exports of foreign merchants from Baku were silk, salt, oil and saffron. In particular, merchants carried oil on their boats from Baku to Mangyshlak pier, from where it was sent to Central-Asiatic countries by caravan route. Russian merchants also exported Baku oil to Astrahan where it was mainly used for military purposes and then it was carried to Western European countries [3, p. 292].

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