

## **The Impact of Multiculturalism on Trade in Medieval Islam: The Azerbaijani Case**

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### **Abstract**

*Islamic civilization in the Middle Ages, the period of cultural, economic, and scientific development called the "Golden Age of Islam", has been a real source of pride for the Muslim world. As a high and dominant civil society, medieval Islamic civilization has now gone through the process of integration, where different cultures and minorities have merged into a single society with the condition that each of them preserves their own roots and creates a unique environment of coexistence. Several factors shaped coexistence in Islamic civilization. The first factor is the emergence of the Islamic religion in the 7th century. The second factor is the multitude of economic ties between the countries included in the Islamic world. Muslims understood that the basis of the economy was trade. The spread of Islam from the Middle East to China, from North Africa to the centres of Europe, developed trade. In the Middle Ages, Azerbaijan became one of the leading countries where trade developed due to its location at the crossroads of trade routes from East to West, which became important for the Caliphate. Thus, the multicultural environment created by the Arab Caliphate created a foundation for the development of trade in Azerbaijan, making this country an important*

*point for the coexistence and welfare of peoples.*

*The article studies the trade relations of Azerbaijan during the Middle Ages, the impact of the multicultural environment on trade, and the development of trade within the framework of the economic relations established with other countries. As for the research methods used in the study, a number of factors that play a key role in the economic development of Azerbaijan have been studied by preserving the principle of historicity, a comparative analysis of trade relations through historical-excursion.*

**Keywords:** Islamic civilization; Trade; Ethnic Diversity; Multiculturalism

## **Introduction**

The Khazars attacked Azerbaijan from the North at the beginning of the 7th century and by the Arabs from the south towards the middle of it. These attacks, which led to decisive changes in the fate of the country and its people, finally resulted in the end of Albania's state independence and the inclusion of the historical lands of Azerbaijan in the composition of a new empire with a large area - the Arab Caliphate. Azerbaijan became part of the Arab Caliphate in the second half of the 7th century. In the years 643-644, during the reign of Caliph Omar, the Arabs could capture only the southern part of the historical territory of Azerbaijan and the lands along the Caspian coast up to Darband. The resistance against the Arabs in the northern provinces of Azerbaijan continued for more than ten years. The fact that Azerbaijan is part of a single state ensures the economic and cultural rapprochement of the country's individual provinces.

The first contact between the Arabs and the Caspian Sea dates back to the time of Rashid Khalifa, Omar bin Khattab (634-

644). Conventional, the relations between Arabs and Khazars can be divided into military-political, religious-cultural and economic relations, the active period of military-political relations coincided with the first 60 years of the 642-656, 681-737, and the Abbasid caliphate (750-1258) is. From the era of Khalifa Aaron (786-809), the economic relations between the parties have developed much more. The Arab-Khazar conflict took place after the Arab armies captured many Azerbaijani cities, including the Derbent, peacefully. In the medieval Arabic sources, much information was given about the Arabs who attacked the khanate. The Arab invasion into Balandjar in 643 led by the famous military commander Salman bin Rabiha caused the Arab-Khazar wars. Most of the Azerbaijani people suffered because of military operations, mainly in Azerbaijan and adjacent territories.<sup>1</sup>

The Arab Caliphate implemented an active resettlement policy in Azerbaijan in order to protect and strengthen its positions. First, a number of Arab tribes living in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula (until the Abbasid dynasty came to power), and then the Arab tribes living in the southern part of the peninsula were relocated and settled in Azerbaijan. The resettlement policy of Arabs in Azerbaijan continued until the first quarter of the 9th century. However, the Khurrami movement, which arose during the reign of Harun al-Rashid and reached its highest peak during the reign of al-Mamun, as well as the withdrawal of many territories from the Caliphate, affected the migration of Arab tribes to the Caucasus and finally stopped it completely. With the arrival of the Arabs and settlement in new territories, fundamental changes took place in Azerbaijan's religious and spiritual life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Şahlar Şərifov, Ərəb-Xəzər Müharibəsi və Azərbaycan. *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, Cilt:7 / Sayı:1, pp. 685-699

<sup>2</sup> Xeyrəbəy Qasimov, *Orta əsrlərdə Azərbaycan mədəniyyəti* (Bakı, 2008), p.91

Before the Arab invasions, the Azerbaijani population had suffered dramatically from the Byzantine-Iranian wars, as well as from the attacks of the northern tribes, so they placed their trust and hope in the new invaders - the Arabs, who promised them happiness and peace on the basis of the Islamic religion. At first, after receiving taxes and tributes, the Arabs did not touch their religious beliefs and customs and preserved their peace as much as possible. Also, in the first decades of the Arab invasions, the taxes and tributes that the Caliphate received from Azerbaijan were much less than during the Sasanian period. Undoubtedly, this increased the sympathy and faith of the local population towards the Arabs and the new religion they brought. The Arabs used Islam as a very effective tool in strengthening their power in Azerbaijan, which was of great economic and strategic importance.<sup>3</sup>

The Arab invasion and the long-term rule of the Caliphate in Azerbaijan left a deep mark on the political life of the country as well as on the socio-economic and cultural life of the country. Although this situation slowed down temporarily, the development of productive forces and the cultural progress of the country, the inclusion of Azerbaijan in the wide-territorial Caliphate objectively attracted it to the general Muslim culture and created the conditions for Islam to spread here. Due to the wide spread of Islam, like all peoples who accepted this religion, the Azerbaijanis, united by the general concept of "Muslim", participated in the process of development of Muslim culture, which was particularly prosperous in the middle of the 9th - 10th centuries, and flourished in the 10th - 12th centuries. Many Azerbaijanis went to study in Baghdad, Kufa, Basra, Damascus, Cairo and other cities, which are the cultural centres of the Arab East.

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<sup>3</sup> Vahid Öməröv. Azərbaycan dövləti ərəb xilafəti tərkibində. *Səs*, Sep.12, 2012, p.14.

Having conquered many countries from Spain to India, the Arabs, realizing the importance of inventing new and better ones, resorted to the easiest way to strengthen their methods of administration in these countries, to ease the administrative work - they kept the administration and tax systems that had passed the experience of the years before them. These places, taken from various peoples and often retaining their previous geographical or administrative names, became numerous provinces of the Caliphate from an independent or dependent country. These provinces usually included lands close to the territory under the control of the commander who conquered those places or the direct participant in the campaign.

As the countries occupied by the Caliphate, including Azerbaijan, became Islamized, the new religion became a great force that united the peoples of these countries ideologically. The Arabic language, the language of the new religion, became the official language of the state starting from the end of the 7th century as a result of the reforms carried out by Caliph Abd al-Malik. Conducting clerical work in Arabic made it necessary for local Azerbaijani officials working in state offices to know this language. Those who did not speak Arabic were not even given ordinary positions. Knowing this language has become an indicator of culture. Studying the Qur'an only in the language in which it was written also expanded the scope of learning and mastering the Arabic language. Every Muslim, regardless of his nationality, tried to learn Arabic, which became the language of communication of the people of the Caliphate. The main factor that led to the wide spread of the Arabic language was the trade-economic, political and cultural relations of Azerbaijanis with other Eastern peoples, which developed especially in the 10th-12th centuries and continued in the following centuries. The most important means of communication in the medieval Eastern world,

the Arabic language, which played the role of an international language, introduced all the Muslim nations living within the Caliphate to each other with their cultural and economic achievements.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, as in the entire territory of the Caliphate, Arab culture, Islam, the Holy Quran, and the Arabic language were spreading, and prominent figures from Azerbaijan also closely participated in the development of this culture. The history of acquaintance and closeness of Azerbaijani science and culture with the Arabs goes back to the 7th century. These cultural relations took on more intensive and unbreakable forms during the Caliphate. Moreover, here, first of all, the language factor should be brought to the fore. In the 7th-10th centuries, the need for the Arabic language in Azerbaijan was increasing. First of all, it was necessary to learn this language in connection with religion, trade, and religious sciences. As Islam became the dominant religion, it forced everyone to implement its provisions, doctrines, and rituals and deeply study its essence, set of laws, moral principles, and legal foundations. Azerbaijani scientists and writers began to write and create in Arabic. This was not accidental but appeared as an expression of the unspoken demand of historical circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that the cities of Azerbaijan, which played an important role in the political and economic life of the country in the Middle Ages, did not emerge suddenly like the feudal cities of other countries. The economic conditions for the emergence of such cities were created at the beginning of the Middle Ages. The general development of urban economy in the Middle Ages led to

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<sup>4</sup> Nailə Vəlixanlı, *Ərəb Xilafəti və Azərbaycan* (Bakı: Azərbaycan dövlət nəşriyyatı, 1993), p.57

<sup>5</sup> Salman Süleymanov, *Ərəb-Türk-Azərbaycan ədəbi əlaqələr tarixinin ilk dövrlərinə qısa bir nəzər. Bakı Dövlət Universiteti İlahiyyat Fakültəsinin Elmi Məcmuəsi*, №23, 2015, p.10

these cities becoming medieval feudal cities.<sup>6</sup> From the end of the 9th century, a period of revival and prosperity began in the life of Azerbaijani cities. Azerbaijani cities developed economically during the period of Arab rule. It is natural that Azerbaijan's cities entered a higher stage of economic development after strengthening the political, ideological and economic positions of the Arabs in the country. Successes achieved in the field of integration of the country into the Arab Caliphate system and expansion of trade and craft activities in cities strengthened the position of Islam in Azerbaijan.<sup>7</sup> The development of cities and urban crafts, the widespread introduction of commodity-money relations into agriculture, and finally, the existence of a wide network of trade routes, which were active in previous centuries, created favorable conditions for the expansion of Azerbaijan's trade and economic relations at the end of the 11th century - 12th century. Cities and regions of both North and South Azerbaijan were connected through a dense network of domestic and international trade routes.

## Method

This study uses qualitative research methods with a focus on historical excursions and comparative analysis. It investigates the impact of multiculturalism on trade in Azerbaijan during the Medieval Islam period by examining historical records, texts, and scholarly works related to trade practices, cultural exchange, and the presence of diverse communities in Islamic regions. This study involves comparing different regions and time periods to identify the patterns of interaction and the influence of multicultural dynamics on economic activities. Primary and secondary sources,

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<sup>6</sup> Ziya Bünyadov, *Azərbaycan VII-IX əsrlərdə*. Bakı: Şərq-Qərb, 2007, p.166

<sup>7</sup> Xeyirbəy Qasimov, *Orta əsrlərdə Azərbaycan mədəniyyəti* (Bakı, 2008), p.94

including historical manuscripts and academic analysis, serve as the basis for data collection. The study applies interpretive analysis to understand how multicultural environments facilitate trade networks and commercial prosperity. All findings are presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between cultural diversity and trade in the medieval Islamic world, especially in the case of Azerbaijan.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The Development of Trade Relations in Medieval Azerbaijan**

Trade is one of the fundamental economic activities necessary to maintain the state's power. Since ancient times, people realized the importance of trade and made progress in science, education, culture, and art thanks to trade. During this period, the independent cities of Azerbaijan and Arran served as administrative centers where the residences of high-ranking officials of the Caliphate were located. As these cities, united within the borders of the Caliphate, which is a centralized state, their remaining internal autonomy was also lost. This union created more favorable conditions for trade development, opening trade routes through the Caspian Sea for merchants. Numerous money hoards discovered in different parts of Europe, Asia and Africa show that during the Caliphate rule, trade was on a large scale. Azerbaijan maintained trade relations with all the developing countries of that time.

However, after Byzantine lost its leading role in world trade, the leading position of the Azerbaijan and Arran cities strengthened in the Caliphate trade relations with neighboring countries. Now, the commercial operations of the Caliphate were diverted to a new channel, and other cities became the main centers of those operations. New administrative centers were created, the directions of some trade routes changed. During this period, the



cities of Gabala, Sheki, and Amaras of ancient Albania lost their former importance as trade centers. In international trade, they were replaced by Barda, Darband, Ardabil, Maragha, Ganja, Shamakhi and other cities located on the main postal routes under the control of the post office of the Caliphate (diwan al-barid). Special post-customs points were placed on these roads, which were of both trade and strategic importance.

The Caspian Sea played an important role in trade development during this period. Having closed the trade routes of the Byzantines through the Black Sea, the Arabs directed new trade routes to the Caspian. This brought about the rapid development of Caspian coastal cities from Astrabad to Darband. Trade in the southern part of the Caspian Sea basin was enhanced by the proximity of the large markets of Baghdad, Bukhara, and Samarkand, which had extensive connections with many Asian countries that had developed handicraft production. The Arabs began to control the Caspian-Volga trade route, previously in the hands of Byzantium. The Khazars, on whom the Byzantine Empire relied, were defeated by the Arabs and did not pose a threat to the new main trade route.

According to Ibn Hawgal, all the port cities of the Caspian Sea, which were in the hands of the Arabs, "were often visited by merchant ships going from one port to another". Being a transit country, Azerbaijan actively participated in trade with other countries. Traders from Azerbaijan, as well as Arabs passing through here, etc., and the merchants of the countries went up the Volga River to the North, to the land of the Bulgars. Merchants paid customs duty in the amount of one-tenth of the value of the goods they had there and made a good trade because the Bulgarians, who had accepted Islam, did not interfere with the trade of these merchants, who were loyal to them. Sable, squirrel, fox fur, leather hats, arrows, swords, armor, slaves, honey, wax,

etc., were brought to the markets of Azerbaijan, Arran, and the whole Caliphate. Textile goods, which were famous at that time, were exported from Arran. These goods were transported to different countries through Darband, a distribution point for textile enterprises' products. In addition, Arran was an exporter of quality dyes and saffron, much in demand in all markets of the Caliphate.<sup>8</sup>

In the first years of the 11th century, the general economic development observed in the previous historical period is gaining greater momentum. In 1027, during the reign of Shaddadi ruler Fazlun II, the construction of the 11-span Khudafarin bridge over the Araz river arose from the necessity of the development of internal and external trade relations. The construction of this bridge was of great importance not only for the economy but also for the political and ethnic diversity of Azerbaijan, and it connected its main provinces closer together. Although the Seljuk invasions temporarily slowed down this general trend of the country's economic development, they could not stop it. The creation of a large empire and its relative stability during the first Seljuk period created favorable conditions for the expansion of Azerbaijan's trade and economic relations. The Seljuk rulers themselves paid special attention to trade development and the regularization of trade routes. During the reign of Malik Shah (1072-1092), when trade reached the highest level of development, an attempt was made to regulate the measurement system and define a single monetary unit. Malik Shah's decree of 1087, which exempted merchants of entire regions from some trade duties, was of great importance for the revival of international trade.<sup>9</sup>

The large number of irrigation ditches and canals, the

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<sup>8</sup> *History of Azerbaijan (III-XIII centuries)*. (Vol. 2), Edited by Naile Velikhanli (Baku: Elm, 2007), p.171

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p.344-345

restoration of the damaged ones and their return to use opened the way for the development of agriculture, sericulture, cotton growing, viticulture, gardens and melons in the lands of South Azerbaijan and North Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani sericulture closely connected it not only with the cities of the Near and Middle East, but also with the countries of Southern Europe. The silk produced here was sold in Venice, Bursa, Damascus and a number of other cities, where beautiful fabrics and velvet were woven from it. At that time, silk was a means of connecting Azerbaijan to the "Great Silk Road" and was the main indicator of the country's exports. Azerbaijani silk was also sold in Russia, and it occupied a prominent place among the goods exported to the territory of this state. Azerbaijan's silk industry had become an important economic factor in international trade and international labor division.<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of diplomatic relations resulted from Azerbaijan's economic development system. The relations between Europe and Azerbaijan formed the basis of the East-West system. Azerbaijan had an important role both economically and strategically. Trade routes connected Azerbaijan not only with neighbouring eastern countries but also with many distant countries - India, Central Asia and even China. This is also proved by the fragments of porcelain dishes and other finds discovered during the archaeological excavations in Baku, Shamakhi and Beylagan. The transformation of handicrafts into a market and commodity production area, commodity-money relations widely interfering with agriculture, and the involvement of nomadic economy in this circle of relations created conditions for an intensive exchange of goods in domestic and foreign markets. Urban crafts were the defining area of commodity production.

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<sup>10</sup> Həsən Qəniyev, *Azərbaycan tarixi (en qədim zamanlardan – XXI əsrin ilk onilliklərinədək)*, (Bakı: Elm və Təhsil, 2019), p.134

Various silk, cotton and woollen fabrics, as metal, wood and leather products, were the main trade products in the domestic and foreign markets. Trade in cloth and other textile products played a primary role here. Fabrics, Chinese jewellery, silk fabrics, coverings, satin, and other fabrics, as well as textile products, occupied an important place among the goods exported by Tabriz to the domestic and foreign markets.

### **Impact of Ethnic Diversity and Multicultural Environment on Trade in Azerbaijan**

The idea of tolerance has indeed taken its place in the history of philosophical ideas since ancient times. All major sacred teachings and religions teach people compassion, sensitivity, respect, etc. It reflects universal values, without which real tolerance is impossible. In the Middle Ages, tolerance was understood as a moral quality and principle, as well as a position of patient approach to the emergence of heresies, sects and worships that are contrary to the main religions. No country in the world is the homeland of a single nation and where democracy develops or an environment of tolerance is created. It is impossible to deny other religions' role in forming its character.

Multiculturalism is a word that defines a society characterized by ethnic, racial, and religious diversity and in which many different cultures live together.<sup>11</sup> Multiculturalism is aimed at preserving, developing and harmonising the cultural diversity of people belonging to different nations and religions in a particular country and the world as a whole, and integrating minority peoples into the national culture of states. As a humanistic and democratic theory or ideology, multiculturalism is the embodiment of tolerance, without which humanism, high culture of individual and

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<sup>11</sup> Səmirə Mir-Bagirzadə. Multikulturalizmə giriş, Bakı, 2021

international relations, mutual understanding between people, mutual enrichment, friendship and cooperation are impossible. The multiculturalism model implies the peaceful coexistence of various ethnocultural parties within a state's borders and the right to officially express and preserve their cultural characteristics and way of life. Multiculturalism is an indispensable tool for the dialogue of cultures and civilizations. The foundations for the development of multiculturalism, tolerance and religious tolerance at the state policy level in Azerbaijan are the ancient history of the country's statehood and the development of these traditions.<sup>12</sup>

Azerbaijan has been a multicultural place inhabited by various religions and ethnic groups from the earliest times of history. The environment of multiculturalism existing in Azerbaijan, the coexistence of different confessions and ethnic communities in peaceful and friendly conditions have its roots in the oldest periods of our history. Azerbaijan is a country where national-religious-racial diversity does not act as a factor that creates differences between people. On the contrary, tolerance and national-religious-racial diversity are presented as the main and superior values of our society. Azerbaijan sees its advantage in the fact that the country is multicultural and multi-confessional. Azerbaijan played the role of a bridge for the transition of Eastern culture to world and European culture or vice versa. Our historical reality itself put forward this ideology for multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multilingual Azerbaijan. Indeed, Azerbaijan is a unique geographical, geopolitical and cultural place where representatives of the most diverse national-ethnic groups live.

The role of Islam in the formation of Azerbaijani culture and identity should be especially noted. The experience of our

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<sup>12</sup>Firəngiz Babayeva, Azərbaycanca multikulturalizm əməlləri, *Yeni Azərbaycan*, 11 Jan. 2020, № 4, p. 6

society based on Islamic culture for thousands of years has played an important role in the process of spiritual revival, in the struggle of our people for self-determination, in the strengthening of our historical memory, and in our cultural-historical unity. Azerbaijan has been a multi-confessional state for several centuries. In Azerbaijan, there have been no incidents that could damage inter-ethnic, inter-cultural and inter-civilizational relations. On the contrary, the experience of different nationalities living peacefully in the same geographical space while maintaining their religions and identities is an example for other countries. The people of Azerbaijan act as a place for inter-civilizational dialogue in the world and as an example for civilizations in the development of tolerance. The possibility of introducing the rich spiritual values to the countries of the world more closely in the process of dialogue is being realized consistently. Because religion and culture originated in the East, but world culture is a synthesis of Islamic and Christian values, Eastern and Western culture.<sup>13</sup>

A country's economic and commercial development is directly proportional to its cultural development. Economic development cannot exist in an imaginary vacuum apart from cultural development.<sup>14</sup> One of the main privileges of ethnic diversity in global trade is its good impact on economic revival. While engaging in global trade with peoples of different religions, languages, races and cultures, they have opportunities to gain access to new markets. At the same time, ethnic diversity in trade fosters real competition, which drives innovation and productivity in global trade. When nations from different cultures and backgrounds come together, every nation presents and sells its

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<sup>13</sup> Ziba Ağayeva, Tolerantlıq mənəvi dirçəlişin əsası kimi. *Heydər Əliyev: Multikulturalizm və Tolerantlıq ideologiyası I Beynəlxalq Elmi Konfransın Materialları* (9 aprel – 5 may 2018), p.11

<sup>14</sup> İradə Səriyeva, Azərbaycanda multikulturalizm siyasətinin prinsipləri və azərbaycançılıq. *Bakı xəbər*, 21 Oct. 2016, p.15

products, and at this time, mutual economic relations begin to emerge. Ultimately, they meet the needs of all civilization. International trade enriches cultural exchange and common understanding between nations. Countries of trade exchange their customs and traditions, not only goods and services. This kind of exchange stimulates mutual understanding, tolerance and acceptance of diverse cultures. It promotes an interconnected global community. For this reason, Islamic civilization is considered as one of the greatest civilizations that ensured coexistence. Because two main issues were emphasized here as the reason for coexistence. First, special attention was paid by the caliphs to the preservation of the existing ethnic cultural diversity. Secondly, representatives of all religious denominations in the society were treated equally.

In Azerbaijan there was mutual influence of cultures through trade and diplomatic relations and the impact of wars, where many ethnic groups dissolved into others, and some continued their development, preserving cultural values, passing them on future generation, forming a unity of harmonious mentality, reflecting their rational development in time and space. Azerbaijan ensured equal opportunities to all of the merchants, regardless of nation, religion, language, race, by defending their lives. Azerbaijan provided legal trade systems and a strategy of tolerance for them. Muslim, Arabic, Jewish, Persian, Turkic and Christian merchants came together for trade in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's favorable strategic position was also characterized by its decision-making at the crossroads of international trade routes. Thus, trade routes from West to East and from East to West, as well as from North to South and from South to North passed through Azerbaijan. As a result, in the Middle Ages, Azerbaijan attracted the attention of merchants from Russia and Europe.

The location of Azerbaijan at the intersection of cultures

created the basis for religious freedom and tolerance, as well as the emergence and development of new religious movements from time to time. Azerbaijan has a very unique culture. In this land, the cultures that formed the modern world civilization such as fire worship, Turkish, Iranian, Caucasian, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, East, West, Slavic, etc., were created. The Islamic culture that is an example for the development of the world, because it is known to determine the place of the City in the economic system of the Caliphate. Islamic ideology and Arab conquests did not destroy city life in any of the areas where they spread. In addition to the restoration of the infrastructure of the cities destroyed during military operations, the Caliphate attached great importance to the establishment of new administrative, artistic and commercial centers.<sup>15</sup> And the socio-economic life of the cities underwent radical changes within the Caliphate. Those changes were not known processes that started earlier, but at the same time accelerated under the influence of the high energy of the new conquerors themselves. The cities during the Caliphate gained a certain specificity due to the influence of their geographical and political development characteristics, as well as many socio-economic and legal institutions of the Muslim society.<sup>16</sup>

Azerbaijan was an important part of the Great Silk Road throughout its existence. This road was called the “Strabon Road” after the geographer Strabo, who first used the name “Azerbaijan” in written historical literature. Some sources also called Azerbaijan the “golden gate” of China and Europe. This road, coming from China and India through the territories of Central Asia, reached the

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<sup>15</sup> Roya Mirzabayova, Xilafət dönəmində birgəyaşayış: Mədəniyyətlərarası dialoq və sülh quruculuğu, *"İslam mədəniyyətində birgəyaşayış təcrübəsi"* mövzusunda beynəlxalq simpozium, (Bakı: AVE print, 20-21 sentyabr, 2022), p.209

<sup>16</sup> Yeganə Gözəlova, *Orta əsrlərdə Avrasiyanın ticarət əlaqələri* (Bakı: Elm, 2012), p.107



Caspian Sea via the Uzbey River, from where it crossed the sea to the lands of Azerbaijan and split into two routes: the first route went west through the Kura River through Colchis and Iberia, and the second route went south and partly north through Derbent. Azerbaijan was considered the safest part of the Great Silk Road. Political and military stability in the territories of Georgia, Colchis and Iberia made this route attractive for merchants. The fact that a large part of the route was a waterway, which was the cheapest means of transport, further increased this attractiveness. As a result, this route was one of the most important directions of the Ancient Silk Road for a long time, especially throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup>

Starting from the Middle Ages, Azerbaijan played an important role in supplying Russia and Western Europe with various Eastern goods, especially ready-made products. With the end of feudalization in European countries, separation of crafts from agriculture, formation of cities, and development of commodity-money relations, these relations expanded even more, and began to take on a mutual character. The flow of Russian and European merchants to the East, including Azerbaijan, increased. In the 13th - 14th centuries, Azerbaijani merchants were busy trading in the commercial centers on the coasts of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, which were the main regions where European-Asian economic relations were carried out. Here, Europeans bought fine silk fabrics, raw silk, various spices, rare gems and other Eastern goods from merchants from various Eastern countries, including Azerbaijan, and then sold those products to Western countries at huge prices. Various oriental goods-silk, cotton fabrics, ornaments, spices, etc. it played an important role in the revival of the famous Champagne fair in

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<sup>17</sup>Şamil Əzizov, Böyük İpək Yolunun inkişaf mərhələləri və Azərbaycanla təsirləri. *İpək Yolu*, No.4, 2022, pp.25-35, p.32

France in the 12th - 13th centuries. Those goods were taken to the Champagne fairs and other trade centers of the West by Italian merchants who acted as mediators in European-Eastern trade. By the way, the famous Italian traveler Marco Polo's information from the second half of the 13th century proves that along with merchants from various Eastern countries, Europeans also had a lively trade in Azerbaijani cities. Marco Polo, who visited Azerbaijan twice in the 70s of the 13th century and at the end of that century, even noted that Genoese ships sailed in the Caspian Sea.<sup>18</sup>

The Caspian region was one of the most significant economic and trade centers in the world. The Northern Silk Road route, which is an important branch of the Silk Road route, passed through the Caspian region, and reached the Black Sea via the Caucasus and India via the eastern countries. In this period, the Silk Road passed through lands under the administration of various Turkic tribes, and the Turks provided the security of the trade routes. The Silk Road trade route, which was the most popular culture and trade line of the ancient world, connecting many civilizations with different routes, passed through the lands under the rule of various Turkic tribes in the Middle Ages. The Turks provided the security of trade routes. The ability of the Turks in military and administrative organization and their success in establishing a strong state have also shown themselves in economic organization and ensuring the security of trade routes. As a matter of fact, a strong economy is one of the main elements of a strong state.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Abdullayev, İlqar. Orta əsrlərdə Azərbaycanın Rusiya və Avropa ölkələri ilə əlaqələri. *Geostrategiya ictimai - siyasi, elmi - nəzəri jurnal*, № 04 (52) (2019), pp.129-135, p.130

<sup>19</sup> Celal Aslan, The Golden Age of Trade around the Caspian Sea (8th-10th Centuries). *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Volume 26

## Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded from the important historical facts listed above that during the medieval period, which is considered the "Golden Age of Islam", Azerbaijan was one of the very favorable strategic points where trade developed not only in the Caucasus region and neighboring countries, but also in the world. The most important feature that makes Azerbaijan unique in the mentioned historical period is that Azerbaijan has always been a country where many peoples with different ethnic, national and religious values live together in peace and tranquillity. This uniqueness has contributed to the development of trade in Azerbaijan, and the peoples living here have always been able to trade in safe conditions.

At the same time, this issue caused wars between powerful states for control of important trade points that passed through here in the Middle Ages, and continuous marches were carried out to Azerbaijan. However, the trade routes passing through Azerbaijan, including the Silk Road, have never lost their historical importance, on the contrary, they have been one of the main reasons for the coexistence of peoples. The ethnic diversity that exists in Azerbaijan has led to the formation of a multicultural environment here in the medieval period, and this, in turn, has made a positive contribution to the development of trade.

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