

The Golden Age of Trade Around the Caspian Sea (8th-10th Centuries)

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Abstract

During the period between the 8th and 10th centuries, the Khazar Region was one of the economic and trade centers that played a key role in the world. The Northern Silk Road route, which is an important branch of the Silk Road route, passed through the Khazar Region, extended to the Black Sea via the Caucasus, and reached India via the eastern countries. In this period, the Silk Road route passed through the lands under the administration of various Turkish tribes, and the security of the trade routes was provided by the Turks. The geography where the Khazar Khanate was founded was located at the intersection of the most important trade routes of the period. The Northern Silk Road route was taken under control during the Khazar Khaganate; its control was ensured, and a safe trade atmosphere was created. The Khazar Khaganate provided equal opportunities to all merchants, protecting their lives and property regardless of the said merchant's race or religion. The Khaganate applied commercial law systems and a policy of tolerance specific to each religion.

This study examines the economic activities of the countries and people around the Caspian Sea between the 8th and 10th centuries and the role and contribution of the Turks, especially the Khazar Khaganate, in the enormous trade environment that occurred in the Khazar Region during this period.

Keywords: Caspian Sea, Northern Silk Road, Khazars, Bulgarians, Trade, Security.

Introduction

The Caspian region which is mentioned as a fascinating land of mysteries in the works of Islamic geographers has an extraordinary beauty and covers a large area. The four corners of the region have different climate and soil characteristics and have been the intersection point of cultures and civilizations throughout history. The regions surrounding the Caspian Sea are noted to be Azerbaijan, Daylem, Gorgan, Tabaristan and Mangiyshlak (Siyahkûh desert) in the work of Ibn Havkal (2015: p. 297), one of the 10th-century Islamic geographers. In the work called *Hudûdu'l-Âlem* (2008: p. 5), which is an anonymous literary work from the 10th century, it is

mentioned that the lands that are located east of the Caspian Sea are known as the country of Guz (Oghuz) in a desert extending to Kharizm. To the west are Azerbaijan and the Caspian peoples, to the south are Gilan, Daylem, Tabaristan and Gorgan. During the period of the Gok Turks, the Silk Road¹, the Caspian Sea, and its surrounding trade routes (except the northwest of Iran) were under Turkish control. However, the trade routes in the north of the Caspian Sea could not be fully controlled until the period of another Turkish state, the Khazar Khaganate², when they remained in the background (Gökçe and Kalkan, 2017: p. 203). The Khazar Khaganate, which played a key role in the history of Eastern Europe is the first Turkish state to establish an orderly state in Eastern Europe with its strong organization, commercial activities, and religious tolerance by controlling and administering the Caucasian coasts, the north of the Black Sea, the Kharizm trade route³ and the Yayık trade route (Yücel, 2002: p. 781).

In the first years of its establishment, the Khazar Khaganate had difficulties in commercial activities due to its struggles against the Islamic armies and Byzantium (Kurat, 1972: p. 33-39). After the 9th century, with the effect of the positive policies followed by the Abbasids, who took over the administration of the Islamic state, the peaceful relations between the Khazars and the Abbasids, opened the door to a new and bright period. A period known as the "Caspian Peace" began in Eastern Europe, which would last for many years. The Khazar Khaganate ensured transportation security by establishing public order in the region and on nearby trade routes. In addition to the East-West trade line, new ports and roads were built alongside international trade routes. Thanks to the Caspian Peace, the country turned into a region where people of art, crafts, and trade converged (Kafesoğlu, 1998: p. 172). Alans, Avars, On-Ogurs, mountain tribes of the Caucasus; Bulgarians, Burtas, Finno tribes, Hungarians in the Kuban region and various Slavic tribes in the Kyiv region, Middle Dnieper and Desna region recognized the dominance of the Khazar Khanate. Thus, the borders of the Khazar Khanate expanded, stretching from the Yayık River

¹It was the main trade route between China, Western countries and Middle Eastern countries in the Ancient History and the Middle Ages. The road continues both from the sea and from the land, by dividing into branches. The main route of the Silk Road was connected to Mesopotamia by the route of China, Central Asia and Iran, and then to the ports of Antakya and Sur from the Mediterranean ports. According to the data obtained from the archaeological excavations, the oldest route is the "Fur Road" which passes through the south of Siberia from the northern routes (Bozkurt, 2000: p. 369).

²It is the Turkish state that ruled in the area covering the basin of the Kuban, Don, Itil and Yayık rivers during the time between the 7th and 11th centuries. The Khazar Khaganate had a dominant position at the crossroads of the most popular trade routes of the period and covered a very important area in terms of geopolitics and geostrategy (Taşağıl, 1998: p. 116).

³The name given to the lands lying in the south of the Aral Sea and to the locals of the region. Kharizm trade route was the crossroads of the main roads connecting Asian countries such as Iran, India, China and Scandinavian countries, southern Russia and Siberia (Özaydın, 1997: p. 217).

to the Dnieper, and occupied a large area on two major trade routes (Yücel, 2002: p. 787). By expanding its borders to the west and north, the Khazar Khaganate became the most powerful state in Eastern Europe and turned into a great trade empire besides its political and military successes (Golden, 1980: p. 111). Treasury revenue depended on taxes from vassal states, commercial revenue, and tax revenue from customs ports. Khagan had no right to confiscate public property (Dunlop, 2008: p. 132).

The Caspian region was a very important port for Byzantium, and amicable commercial relations were established between the two states. There was constant traffic between Byzantium and the Khazar Khaganate, mainly for imports and exports (Brook, 2002: p. 834). While the fur trade was very popular inside the country, art and jewelry were imported from Byzantium and Iran, as well as silk fabrics and valuables from Turkestan and China. An enormous trade atmosphere was created in the Caspian basin, which is almost the heart of eastern, western, northern, and southern trade.

Due to the increase in the level of prosperity in the region, the Caspian and Bulgarian people adopted a sedentary life earlier than the other Turkic tribes of the period, and many new cities were established here (Kurat, 1972: p. 31). This secure trade environment created by the Khazar Khanate was maintained with the support of the İdil Bulgar Khanate⁴. The Bulgarians of İdil were closely concerned with the security of merchants and trade routes; consequently, the security of caravanserais and market sand ports was ensured (Özdal, 2018: p. 188).

İtil Trade Route

Towards the end of the 8th century, two trade routes that were actively used in Eastern Europe had remarkable importance. One of the routes, starting from the İtil region, would reach north over the İtil River; the other branch of the same route would extend to the Kama River and the Urals region, over the Volga River and its upper branches to Lake Ladoga and the Finnish Gulf, and then to the Scandinavian countries. The second route was the trade route between Scandinavia and Byzantium which lead to Lake İlmenvia the Dnieper River as well as to present day Sweden from the Gulf of Finland. Trade activities with Islamic countries such as Scandinavia, China, Turkestan, Iraq, Syria, and Iran were carried out over the İtil

⁴After the collapse of the Western Gok Turk State (630) The Bulgarian Turks, who lived under the administration of it, established the Great Bulgarian State under the leadership of their leader Kuvrat (Kurt) With the death of Kuvrat in 665, this state became subject to the Khazar Khanate. The ancestors of the İdil Bulgarian Khanate are the Turkish community known as Ogur (Ugur) belonging to the Western Turkish tribes. It is known as the first Turkish state to accept Islam in the region (Taşağıl, 2000: p. 472). Palaces, mosques, baths, inscriptions, tombstones, jewelery, helmets, arrows, swords, armor and such historical remains from the period of Khazar Khanate and İdil Bulgar Khanate have survived to the present day (Topsakal, 2019: p.57).

river, and the trade route from the Harizm region to the Itil region passed through lower Itil (Kurat, 1972: p. 33).

On this route, commercial goods collected from Eastern Europe under the administration of the Khazar Khaganate were shipped to Baghdad and a solid trade chain was established from east to west and from west to east (Golden, 1980: p.107). Caravanserais, passages, and many cities were built by the Volga Bulgars and the Khazar Khaganate on the Scandinavian and Caspian route to establish the control and security of the fur road trade, Suvar, Bilyar, Osel, Belencer, Bulgaria, Semender, Sarkel are some of these cities (Tombuloğlu and Gökçe, 2018: p. 76). Moreover, the Khazar Khaganate established a trade center called "Sambata" in the city of Kyiv, which stood out as an important trade center and had a port to the Dnieper River (Kurat, 1972: p. 33). When the Waregs⁵ (Slavs) under Oleg settled in Kyiv in 882, the region was under the control of the Khazar Khaganate (encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com. Kyiv).

In the Itil River region, there are partially forested areas, suitable agricultural areas, and swampy areas as well. While agriculture and farming were among the economic activities in the region, fishing also had an important place. The Itil region was the trade center of Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Russian and Muslim merchants (Özdağ, 2018: p. 177-187).

Bulgar

The city of Bulgar was founded along the Itil River and borders the Burtas region. The Bulgar people are a branch of the Turks. The name of their ruler was Elmuş/Elman and he adopted the religion of Islam. The population here consisted of the Bulgar, Bersula, and Eşgal people—all three groups lived in the same region (Gerdîzî, 2014: p. 184). Most of the people who settled along both banks of the Itil River adopted the religion of Islam. The residential area on the west side of the Itil River covers a larger area and the city is surrounded by walls. Trade and agriculture are the main livelihoods of the people of the region. There was a fifteen-day-long distance between the Khazars and Bulgars, and since there were a lot of agricultural products among the Khazars, there was constant trade with the Caspian region.

Although Bulgar was a small city without many assets, it was an important trade center and was a frequent destination for Russian merchants. Beeswax, silk, mercury, various furs, and a kind of glue made from bones were highly in-demand export products. Sable, squirrel, and various animal furs were very popular. Sable fur was

⁵The people of Scandinavian origin that have led up to the people of today's Russia. Arabs and Persians called the northern fur traders Rus. The Russians today comprise the largest branch of the eastern Slavs. Islamic sources named the Slavic tribes, including the Russian people, as "Sakabile" (Ibn Hürdazbih, 2008: p. 130).

as precious as gold and silver to the people of the region, and it was also used instead of money. Russian and Arab traders also used a type of silver coin in the region. In the region, red and black fox furs brought from the Burtas region were in high demand (Bekrî, 2015: p.354).

Trade caravans were constantly going back and forth between the Khwarizm region of Khorasan and the Bulgar region. This trade route passed through the lands under the administration of various Turkish tribes and the security of the trade routes was ensured by the Turks (Mas'udi, 2004: p. 73). In this period, the city of Bulgar was a big market where Iran, Arab, Caspian, Scandinavian, Turkmenistan, and Slavic countries traded (Taşağıl, 2000: p. 473). Russian, Baltic, Scandinavian, Turkestan, Arab, Byzantine, and Persian merchants were not missing from Idil Bulgar lands (Yüce, 1992: p. 390).

Port of Itil

In the 10th century, the Port of Itil was one of the most important ports of the İdil Bulgar State. The port covered a very large area, and the city was built on both sides of the river. While the products of northern countries were transported to the east by means of trade ships sailing on the Itil River, various goods and silver coins were brought from Islamic lands (Özdal, 2018: p. 187). Itil Port was a vibrant trade center and Russian merchant ships frequented the port. The Khazar Khaganate charged one out of ten slaves on the commercial ships that came to the port as tax and taxed 1/10 of other goods (Fadlan, 2017: p. 56).

Burtas and Belkar

The Burtas region is located between the Caspian and Bulgar region. In this period, the region, which was connected to the Khazar Khanate, had large lands and a rich forest. The Burtas are known as a Turkish nation living on the Itil river. The shores of Burtas were populated by Turks who had adopted a sedentary lifestyle and were loyal to the Khazar king (Ibn Rüsteh, 2010: p. 179). The people of the Caspian used to reach the Burtas River by directing the flow of the river with their boats. The Burtas River stretched towards the Bulgar region, and ships going between the Bulgars and the Caspian used this route.

The Burtas people produced fur known as "burtasiye" from the skin of red and black foxes and traded fur and leather. The black fox fur, which was the most popular among all animal furs, was offered for sale for a hundred dinars or more. Black fox fur was especially sought out by rulers and was more expensive than red fur. The rulers used to have headgear and caftan made from Burtas fur (Mas'udi, 2004: p. 72). It was written by Bekrî (2015: p. 355) that there were commerce and trade houses in the city of Burtas. Honey and marten wool were the most sought-after commodities. In addition, heather was another popular commercial product in the

region.

In addition, heather was another popular commercial product in the region. The Burtas, who were also engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, raised cattle, sheep, and goats.

The city of Belkar is adjacent to the Burtas region by the Itil River. While the Burtas adopted a religion similar to that of the Guzziyes (Oghuz), the people of the city of Belkar adopted Islam. The people of Belkar city had close commercial relations with the Khazars and the Russians.

Sarkel

The city of Sarkel, which was the capital of the Khazar Khaganate for a period, was established at a strategic point on the Northern Silk Road route. The merchants coming from the Black Sea by ship could continue their way by land starting from this region. From this region to the south, the transition to Azov and its surroundings was supervised and taken under control (Karatay, 2010: p. 75-89).

As a result of the archaeological excavations carried out by Mikhail Artamonov in 1941 and 1951, new information about the city of Sarkel was unearthed. The excavations were carried out approximately 50 km above the confluence of the Don and Donets rivers. According to the data obtained as a result of the excavations, the economy of the 10th-century city of Sarkel was quite advanced in trade, crafts, and agriculture. Moreover, the Don River was an exceptionally active spot in terms of fishing (Çerezci, 2019: p. 3).

As a result of the excavations, it was determined that the Sarkel Castle⁶ was built with the support of Byzantine engineers in order to ensure security in Sarkel (Artmononav, 2008: p. 243). Sarkel Castle, which has Central Asian features, was established on the access road to the lower region of the Don River (Taşağıl, 1998, p.120). According to the famous chronicle of the 9th-century Byzantine historian Theophanes, the Sarkel region was supervised by three-hundred thousand border guards assigned by the Khazar Khaganate, who changed their duties on a rotating basis (Karatay, 2010: p. 72). This castle was undoubtedly built as a military outpost to ensure the control and security of the region (Artmononav, 2008: p. 243-245).

According to the archaeological data, it was determined that ceramic workshops, black smith forges, and mining work⁷ were at an advanced level in Sarkel. Also, wheat warehouses and many tools used for grinding the grain were unearthed. In the

⁶It means "The White Castle" in Khazar, it is known that this castle was built for defense against Hungarian and Pecheneg attacks. Turkish stamps, war and agricultural tools specific to the peoples of Central Asia were found on the castle bricks (Çerezci, 2019: p. 6).

⁷Some of the various craft products such as bronze earrings, bracelets and rings, spears, three-winged arrows, scissors, and stirrups that were reached as a result of archaeological excavations are exhibited in the Hermitage Museum today (Çerezci, 2019: p.9).

excavations, horse and horse running gear tools were found buried with human skeletons which is a tradition belonging to the Turkish steppe culture.

The city of Sarkel can be considered as a type of customs area, as it was at the intersection point of important trade routes. For example, Arab, Jewish and Byzantine traders often went to Sarkel to buy fur (Çerezci, 2019: p. 3-9). The caravanserais found in the city of Sarkel bear the characteristics of Turkish-Islamic architecture. While the upper floors of the caravanserais had rooms for merchants, the lower floors were built as barns and warehouses (Gökçe and Kalkan, 2017: p. 210).

Semender

According to the archaeological excavations carried out in Tarki and Makhachkala; The city of Semender, mentioned in the 10th -century Islamic sources, is in today's Makhachkala region (Korkmaz, 2002: p. 374). Kazvini (2008: p. 251) noted that the city of Semender, located to the west of the Caspian Sea, is one of the important trade stops of the region. High-quality agricultural products, fruits, and vegetables are grown in Semender, its vineyards are especially famous. There were approximately 40,000 vineyards from the Semender region to the Serir region (Golden, 1980: p. 103).

Caucasus Region

The Caucasus Mountains extending from the Anapa peninsula separating the eastern part of the Azov Sea and the Black Sea to the Absheron peninsula on the Caspian Sea coast and the region stretching on both sides are called the Caucasus region (Dursun, 2001: p. 157). The region has strategic importance in terms of its location at the intersection of Asian and European trade routes (Aliev, 2001: p.158). The Caucasus region is covered with mountainous areas, grasslands, and dense forests. The Terek River in the region is a fertile agricultural area with a narrow basin (Özdal, 2018: p. 177). Mas'udi (2004: p.65) addresses that the "Kabh [Caucasian]⁸ mountain is a big mountain and covers a large area. It contains many peoples and countries. Seventy-two nations live on this mountain. Every nation has its own ruler and language unlike any other. There are tributaries and plains on the mountain. The city of Bab al-Abwab is in one of these branches."

The Caucasus region is very rich in terms of gold, copper and silver mines. The control and security of the mines in the region such as gold and silver were provided by the Khazar Khaganate (Dunlop, 2008: p. 316; Artmononav, 2008: p. 299). The extracted copper, silver, and gold were processed by jewelers. The Dagestan region

⁸The Caucasus is a chain of mountains extending between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea in an east-west parallel. This mountain range, whose average height exceeds five thousand meters in the middle parts, forms the southeast region of the European border (Mustafayev, 2018: p. 15).

was quite famous in this regard. Especially the city of Zergen was quite advanced in jewelry. It is known that the city got its name from the word "zergen", which means jeweler in Persian. Ancient Iranians called this region Zergeran. Mas'udi and Belazuri, 10th-century Islamic geographers, mentioned that the village of Zergeran was advanced in jewelry in their works (Canbek, 1978: p. 33).

Derbent (Bab al-Abwab)

According to archaeological findings, the initial foundation of the city of Derbent⁹ dates back to the Ancient History, and it is a castle as well as a settlement, established between the Caspian Sea and the slopes of the Greater Caucasus mountains (Aliev, 1994: p. 164). The region, which was captured by the Khazars in 627, was conquered by Arab-Islamic armies in 652. During the Abbasid period, the regional rule passed to the Khazars again in 799. In 869, it came under the rule of the Hashemites, an Arab dynasty, and was used as the capital (Aydoymuşoğlu, 2021, p. 757).

Makdisi (2018: p.265) stated in his work that the city was surrounded by walls on three sides, and watch towers were built on those walls. On the northern side of the city, there were two gates named Bâbü'l Îmâre (Stone Gate) and Bâbü'l Cihâd (Forty Gates).” The fourth part of the city was covered by the port of Derbent. In the west of the city were the Hazaran administrative units, the palace, and the military camp. Derbent, which was the main gateway to the Caucasus in the Middle Ages, was not only a strategic fortress but also an international trade and craft center (Aydoymuşoğlu, 2021: p.759).

Agriculture was carried out in the region, and since the product variety was low, the need for fruit was mostly met from the surrounding regions. The city of Derbent was quite good at weaving and saffron cultivation. Fabric, weaving products, and madder produced in Derbent were among the main products exported. Linen dresses produced here were famous and especially in demand from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Arran region (Havkal, 2015: p. 340).

Derbent (Bab al-Abwab) Port

Derbent Port had the distinction of being the largest commercial port of the Caspian Sea. The port was the scene of the busy activities of the merchants who traded and transported goods (Aliev, 1994: p.164). In the work of Ibn Havkal (2015: p. 340), who states that the port is also the port of Tabaristan, Gorgan, Serir, and Daylam

⁹According to Arabian sources, the region called “Derbent” by Persians has several meanings like; gate, closed gate or border post. Derbent, which means "door, gates, police station" in Arabic has been also known as “el-Bâb”, “el- Ebvâb” and later “Bâbülebvbab”, “Bâbülhâdîd” which means “the iron door”. The Turkish tribes who settled in the north of the region before the Arab conquests used the name "TemürKapıg / DemürKapı" for this region (Aliev, 1994: p.164).

regions, the following statements about the Derbent Port are included:

“Derbent city is a city on the edge of the Caspian Sea. There is a port in the middle where ships dock. In this port, there is a building outside the sea; the water of this port coming from the Caspian is like a dam between two mountains along it. There is a closed gate on this dam. It is reinforced with a pillow-like support column. The same water was supported by a mountain above it. The water is under this door. There is an entrance that turns towards the door side for ships. There is a long chain at the mouth of the entrance door where the ships enter. This chain is similar to that of the city walls in Damascus, Beirut, and the chain in the Gulf of Constantinople. There is a lock on it for the one who deals with the sea business. No ship can enter and leave the sea without the permission of the owner of this lock. The dam body consists of lead-reinforced rocks.”

As it can be understood, shelters were built against any external attack and storm disaster against the Derbent Port, and a narrow passage was left for the ships. This place was closed with chains in times of danger. Derbent Port was also the central port where market products from Azerbaijan, Arran, and Shirvan were gathered. Ships coming from the west, north, and south of the Caspian Sea had the opportunity to stay in this port (Aydoymuşoğlu, 2021, p. 759).

The slave trade in Derbent Port was one of the most important sources of income in the region. In this respect, the city was almost like the slave warehouse of the Caspian Sea region. Many Slavic, Turkish, Armenian, and Caucasian slaves were brought to the city of Derbent (Havkal, 2015: p. 340).

Arran

Arran¹⁰, one of the important trade regions of the Middle Ages, is located in the eastern Caucasus, between the Aras and Kur rivers. It has Shirvan located in the north, Azerbaijan in the south, and Mughan in the southeast. The Arran region covers almost all of the eastern Trans-Caucasus. The city of Barda¹¹, which was founded by the Sassanid ruler I. Kubad in the 6th century to prevent Hun attacks was the capital of the Arran region until the 10th century (Özaydın, 1991: p. 394). The development of economic and commercial activities in the Arran region resulted in a wide range of products and large markets. So much so that markets were established even in villages (Mustafayev, 2018: p. 34-39). In the work of Makdisi (2018: p. 267) the Berzend district, located within the borders of Mughan, was the shopping center of the Armenians.

¹⁰The region that was known as "Albania" by the Romans and Greeks took the name of "Arran" after the Arab-Islamic conquest. Since the region is located between two rivers, it was also called "Beyne'n-nehreyn" by Islamic geographers (Özaydın, 1991: p. 394).

¹¹This area is in the center of the Karabakh plain, on the banks of the Terter river, which is 319 km away from today's Baku (Mustafayev, 2018: p. 26).

Barda

In the 6th century, on the Silk Road trade route stretching from Azerbaijan to the northern Caucasus region, the Arran region, Barda, and its vicinity (especially the city of Derbent) was the warehouse of commercial goods. Mubareke Village was the port of the city of Barda and trade was carried out by ships on the Aras and Kura rivers as well as by the highway route. During the period of Arab-Islamic domination in the region, Barda was a center of trade. The trade route of Barda, Tabriz, Kerman, and Sultaniye was at the intersection of the Indian trade route. Commercial products from India were transferred to Arran via the Caspian Sea and brought to the Black Sea via the Kur River and highways.

Commercial goods brought from the Barda and Debil (Divin) trade route via Byzantium and the Black Sea were transported to the Middle East and Far East. Thanks to the Caucasus trade route, Arab and Byzantine merchants kept their commercial relations with each other warm. Asian merchants on their way to Byzantine lands gathered in Trabzon, and commercial products were shipped from Trabzon to the Caucasus and southern countries. Starting from Baghdad, the northern trade route stretched from Baghdad to the lands of Barda, Khazar, Bulgar, and Burtas through the Zanzan, Ardabil, Caucasus region.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, the Barda markets crossed the borders of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan and rose to the level of the world common market. The city of Barda, which rose rapidly from the 5th century onwards and reached its peak in cultural, political, and economic terms in the 10th century, evoked paradise with its rich underground beds, fertile lands, fruits, fragrant flowers, pure air, and abundant water. Artworks produced in the region were also offered for sale in the markets. In this way, the region has progressed considerably in culture and art. After the 10th century, the city of Barda lost its former importance as a result of the Russian invasion and left its place to the city of Beylekan. In the 10th and 11th centuries, the Shaddadis¹² dominated the region (Mustafayev, 2018: p. 34-39).

Shirvan

Shirvan, which forms a part of Arran and is a historical region, is called "Ahvan" colloquially. Conquered by Arab-Islamic armies in the mid-7th century, the region was ruled by Arab dynasties and the Shirvanshah Dynasty, which gained strength in the region and held control for a long time. The western parts of Shirvan are mountainous and dry. For this reason, it is included in the old maps as "Cambisena",

¹²After the Abbasid State lost its former power, the Islamic Dynasty (Bezer 409), which was formed by a mixture of Kurds and Arabs, ruled in Arran and Eastern Anatolia between the years 951 and 1175(Bezer, 2010: p. 409).

that is, “waterless province” (Aydın, 2010: p. 204).

From Shirvan, which is located on the trade routes, along the seacoast, one could go to Derbent, the most important port of the region. Positioned to the west of the Caspian Sea, Shirvan stretches along the Kur River to Baku. Its income was one million dinars, and it is one of the important trade points. Trade in naphtha (a type of mineral oil from petroleum derivatives) occupies an important place in the region (Aydoymuşoğlu, 2021: p. 759).

Baku Port

Baku has made a name for itself with its naphtha and salt mines since ancient times. As a matter of fact, in the works of medieval Greek historians; There are expressions of “flames rising from underwater cliffs”. In the 6th and 7th centuries, during the Sassanid period, oil was used in the construction of castles and as a weapon in the form of fireballs in the region (Valişov, 2008: p. 42). According to information in Islamic sources, Baku was a port city that sent naphtha to Tabaristan and Daylam (Özdal, 2018: p. 187).

It was written by Abu Dulef (2014: p.30) that there were two oil fields in Baku with a daily yield of one thousand dirhams. One of these mines was operated day and night. Mas'udi (2004: p. 78) used the following statements about the naphtha mines in Baku: “The ships departing from these cities in the Caspian Sea come to Baku. This is the city of white and other naphtha mines. Allah knows the truth, but white naphtha (natural gas) is only found here in the world. Baku is on the coast of Shirvan. There is a torch where this naphtha mine is. It is a source of fire; it burns constantly, and it shoots into the sky.”

Baku, which was an economic center in the Shirvan region beginning in the 9th century, turned into an international trade port from the 10th century. Islamic countries could make commercial journeys to the Gîlan, Gorgan, Tabaristan, and Arran regions via the Caspian Sea (Valişov, 2008: p. 45).

Daylam and Gîlan Region

The Daylam and Gîlan (Cîl) regions are located in the southwest of the Caspian Sea (Gökçe and Kalkan, 2017: p. 205). Daylem region denoted all the regions south of the Caspian Sea in the 10th century. According to the information in *Ḥudûdü'l-‘âlem* (2008: p. 91), the Daylam region is within the borders of the western part of Azerbaijan and the Arran region as well as the Caspian Sea in the north. Today, these are generally accepted as the limits of Daylam. It is a steep region on the slopes of the Elburz Mountain Range extending along the Caspian Sea (Yazıcı, 1994: p. 263). The Elburz Mountains have extraordinarily rich deposits of gold, copper, silver, lead, and semi-precious metals (Altungök, 2012: p. 260).

In the Daylam region, which is very rich in forests, people are generally engaged in

agriculture and animal husbandry. While women more commonly dealt with agricultural work, men served as soldiers. Small cattle breeding was practiced in the region rather than cattle breeding. In addition to agriculture and animal husbandry, weaving constituted an important place among the income sources of the region. Raw silk and wool clothes were produced in the region (Usluer, 2015: p. 77). Makdisi (2018: p.241) addressed that the region was known as the land of wool and the fabrics produced were especially famous in Egypt and Iraq and were exported to other regions. The region is very suitable for agriculture; Rice, figs, grapes, olives, and carob were the main agricultural products exported all over the country. The product range of the markets established in the region was quite wide; There were also female sellers in the markets that were set up once a week and once every fortnight in some cities. Daylam was generally a wealthy region (Usluer, 2015: p. 77). Ibnu'l Fakih states in his work that the annual tax amount of the Daylam region is approximately ten thousand dirhams (Güllü, 2007: p. 8).

Gilan

Azerbaijan is the region between Jibal and the Caspian Sea. The Gilan region is developed and well-maintained. Its living conditions are suitable, and its blessings abound. There are many rivers flowing in the region. The Sefid-rud River is the largest of these rivers and empties into the Caspian Sea. The region is a route that was especially used by foreign traders, and the Sefid-rud River is an important commercial port for boats coming from Kevtem, Kûtam, and other parts of the Caspian.

According to information in the sources, merchants from all over the world came to Gilan. Silk, cotton, brooms, prayer rugs, straw, and sea fish were the main export products. Various clothes produced by the people of the region were exported to Baku. Naphtha shipments from Baku to Gilan were easily provided (Gökçe and Kalkan, 2017: p. 205). Freight and passenger transportation was carried out from the Bender Enzâli Port located in the region (Özdal, 2018: p. 187).

Tabaristan

Tabaristan is located to the south of the Caspian Sea. The region known today as Mazandaran is separated from the Iranian plateau by the Elburz mountains. Being a mountainous and forested region, it has many natural defenses. For this reason, it was the region where the Islamic conquests progressed with the most difficulty (Özgüdenli, 2010: p. 322). According to the information in the work of Ibn Havkal (2015: p. 295), Tabaristan is a region that cannot be shared between the rulers of the Rey and Khorasan regions. From time to time, the Khorasan region was victorious, and a sermon was given on behalf of the Samanoğulları. From time to time, Ruknû'd Devle, the ruler of Rey, was victorious.

The capital city, Amûl, is the richest city in the region and is one of the stops for traders. In addition to commercial activities, craft and agricultural activities developed in Amul (Gökçe and Kalkan, 2017: p. 206). Melon, citrus fruits, garlic, rice, wheat, corn, flax, hemp were the main agricultural products (Usluer, 2015: p. 79). Timber was produced from the boxwood tree grown in the city of Amul. The city was among the most frequented areas of merchants (Hudûdü'l-Alem, 2008: p. 93).

The city of Amul is a rich region in terms of natural resources like gold, aluminum, white aluminum, mineral deposits, and fresh water. This type of aluminum used for polishing darkened silver is not found elsewhere. The main export products in the region are wool and silk fabrics, fabric with gold thread, rugs embroidered with gold thread, lace, wooden household goods, dishes, various combs, scales, and shark skin. It is especially famous for its embroidered handkerchiefs (Abu Dulef, 2014: p.46).

Gorgan

The city of Gorgan, located in the southeast of the Caspian Sea, was established between a dry valley and a mountain, constituting the eastern part of the Mazendaran region. Right in the middle of the city, the Gorgan river, which stretches from the Tabaristan region to the east of the Caspian Sea and towards the Hârizm region, flows and can be reached by ships on the river. During the Islamic conquests in the Omar period, a local ruler named Merzûban and the more powerful and dominant Turkic chief Ruzbân Sûl in power, are seen in the Gorgan region. Ruzban Sûl recognized Islamic domination by agreeing to pay a certain amount of jizya without going to war with the armies of Islam. It is seen that the province of Gorgan paid a tax of 200,000 dirhams annually during the Osman period. While full dominance was achieved in the region during the Umayyad period, the administration of local dynasties was more dominant during the Abbasid period (9th-10th centuries). It is noted by Ibn Havkal (2015: p. 295) that Gorgan is also a region like Tabaristan that could not be shared between the administrators of Rey and Khorasan regions for years.

Gorgan was one of the most important stops of the trade caravans coming from the north (Kurtuluş, 1993: p. 131). When Russian merchants came to Hamlic, a city of the Caspian region, they paid a 10/1 tax to the ruler of this place and sailed towards the Gorgan Sea from there (Ibn Hurdazbih, 2008: p. 130-131). Quality silk fabrics and various textile products produced in the Gorgan region were in demand from all over the world. Raw silk, black silk fabrics, silk scarves, embossed fabrics, underwear, and clothes were exported to many parts of the world, up to Yemen. Lumber, various goods made of wood, and a kind of bow and arrow made of wood were among the popular export products (Usluer, 2015: p. 81).

The lands of Gorgan are very fertile, and the main agricultural products are figs,

dates, olives, sugar cane, oranges, pomegranates, and walnuts. According to 10th-century Islamic historical sources, the main agricultural products exported are olives, figs, and carob. Fishing activities occupy a very important place in the city economy. There are different and remarkable stones with different characteristics in the region (Bekrî, 2015: p. 355; Abu Dulef, 2014: p. 22).

Dirhams and dinars were used in transactions related to shopping in Gorgan. Various mines were also mined and operated in this region. The mines extracted from here were generally sold to the domestic market. The salt extracted from the Limrâsk salt mine was sent to Tabaristan and Jurjan. Sulfur, starch, iron, and yellow sulfide were mined from Damavend Mountain. Yellow sulfur was a sought-after metal in chemistry and various crafts (Usluer, 2015: p. 84)

Abeskun Port

The city of Abeskun is on the coast of Gorgan and is about three days away from Gorgan. Merchant ships departing from Abeskun, Gîl, and Daylam coasts along the Gorgan coasts would first enter the city of Itil via the Caspian River (Mas'udi, 2004: p. 78). The port of Abeskun, located on the Iranian coast, was connected to the historical Silk Road, extending to Damgan and Nişabûr through the city of Gorgan. According to the information in the Islamic sources, trade between the ports of Itil, Derbent, and Abeskun was quite active. Since it was difficult to reach the Daylam region by road, freight and passenger transportation was carried out from Abeskun Port. Ships sailing from Abeskun Port to İtil Port would stop by Baku and obtain white naphtha (Özdal, 2018: p. 187).

Regarding the port of Abeskun in Makdîsî (2018: p. 360); "Abeskun is by the sea and has a brick castle on it. Gorgan's port is Rehâb's warehouse. In Istahri's work, it shows Abeskun Port again as the most useful port of the southern Caspian. According to the information in the work of Ibn Havkal (2015: p. 295), the port of Abeskun is the most popular and largest port of the Gorgan region and is a kind of customs area. Silk cocoons produced in the Gorgan region were sent to Tabaristan and other surrounding regions via the Abeskun Port (Gökçe and Kalkan, 2017: p. 207).

Dehistan

When the present-day ruins of the city of Dehistan are examined, the region, which is approximately 90 km away from the Kızilterek River, was an important art and trade center in the Middle Ages. As can be seen from the ruins, the city was established on a flat area and was surrounded by mud brick walls and towers. There is little information about Dehistan in medieval sources. As a matter of fact, the region known as "Dahistan" is also referred to as "Dihistan" in some sources. According to research, there has been a Turkic presence in the region since the 5th

century when it was under the rule of the Shul dynasty, and it is known that the name of the region was taken from a Turkic tribe, "Dahlar" (Türkmen, 2009: p. 206). There is a ribat (fortress surrounded by walls) built for defense against the Hun Turks in the region (Lecomte, 2007: p. 308).

It is written by Ibn Havkal (2015: p. 289), a 10th-century Islamic geographer, that Dehistan is a city located in the Gorgan region and is located above the city of Abeskun. Dehistan is a region that is about 50 leagues (about 5 kilometers in length) from the city of Abeskun.

They have a ribat called Dehistan made to defend against Turkic fighters. Its people are few and its waters are bitter; besides, Dehistan is a city that everyone wants to go and see. The city of Dehistan indents towards the sea and forms the shallow shores of the Caspian Sea, where ships used to stay in this region on windy and stormy days. The coast is also very suitable for fishing. In this respect, people in the surrounding region used to come here to fish (Havkal, 2015: p. 295-298). Mas'udi (2004, p. 245) wrote that Dehistan was a city lost in sugarcane gardens.

Mangıyshlaklak Region

In 10th century Islamic historical sources, Mangıyshlaklak (Black-kûh) borders do not refer to a specific geographical area but instead to a border country between the Khazar Khaganate and the Gorgan region. In general, it is observed that the name Mangıyshlaklak¹³ is used for the northern and eastern shores of the Caspian Sea and the west of the Aral Sea (Upper country). The ancient Turks, especially the Oghuz, were engaged in animal husbandry in this region. As a matter of fact, Kaşgarlı Mahmud, in his work titled *Divan-ı Lûgat-ı Türk*, showed the region as a region in the Oghuz country and stated that the name of the region means "sheep shelter". İstahri's work was titled *Mesâlik-i Memâlik*. The empty and desolate Mangıyshlaklak region was inhabited by the Oghuzes in the 10th century. The region's soil is rather unproductive, but on the other hand, it has pastures suitable for raising livestock and a safer physical geography compared to other regions (Taşağıl, 2003: p. 569).

Dasht-ı Kıpçak Region

The name "Kıpçak" is the name given to the community consisting of various Turkic tribes living in the western regions of the Gok Turk State in the 8th century (Bilgin and Hacıeminoğlu, 2002: p. 421). The geography of Kıpçaks covers a very wide geography, and the region known as Deşt-ı Kıpçak covers Eastern Europe and the north of the Black Sea. The region, which includes today's Ukraine, has high-mineral soil, and agriculture in the region is extremely limited due to its desert climate. In addition, the region has large meadows and is very suitable for animal

¹³It is known that the name of the region comes from the expression "Ming-Kışlag"; meaning "Thousand Winter Quarters" (Taşağıl, 2003: p.569).

husbandry. The fur trade is in demand in the area, especially in the slave-trade region (Öztunç, 2022: p. 8).

Merchant Peoples in the Land of the Khazars

The ethnic structure of the medieval Khazars was quite colorful. There were people of seventy-two nationalities around the Caspian Sea. Russian and Turkic people in the north, Arrians in the south, Oghuzes in the Mangıyşlak region after these cond half of the 10th century, Arab tribes from Damascus, Kufe and Basra with the Islamic conquests are the people living in the Caspian region (Özdal, 2018: p. 178).

Arab, Andalusian, Azerbaijani, Iranian, Russian, and Jewish merchants engaged in active commercial activities in the ports of the Caspian Sea. The Radani (Razani)¹⁴ Jews took an especially active role in a wide area. One of the routes frequently used by Jews, the Itil coast, opened from Hamlic to the Caspian Sea and reached the Belh region via the Abeskun Port. Russians were trading in a wide area from the Baltic Sea to the Caspian Sea. They were gathered on one of the river islands, especially in the Itil region (Özdal, 2018: p. 189).

Ibn Hurdazbih (2008, p.131) noted that Russian merchants crossed the Caspian Sea in the 9th century and continued their commercial activities in Baghdad with camels. Ibn Rusta (2010: p.183) wrote, "Waregs are remarkable with their Soleimanis words on their clean clothes with gold trim". Gerdizi (2014: p.185) wrote, "Russians are respectful and good people". Most of the Russian merchants were engaged in the slave trade. Merchants doing business in the Caspian region had to pay tax at the rate of 1/10 to the Khazar ruler. Likewise, in the slave trade, one out of 10 slaves were given as tax.

Jewish merchants could speak Persian, Arabic, Greek, Slavic, Efrec, and Andalusian (Ibn Hurdazbih, 2008: p. 130-131). The Khazar Khaganate had seven senior rulers, consisting of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. These judges handled the cases between the merchants. Merchants were judged according to their own religion and rules, and the Khagan would not be involved in such cases (Dunlop, 2008: p. 132).

During the Middle Ages, the political actors that played an active role in the Caspian Sea constantly changed, but no political power established a tyrannical dominion over any part of the Caspian Sea. The Caspian Sea and its surroundings had what today's economists call "free access". Even though the tide was almost non-existent in the Caspian Sea, partly eddies and currents and large flood waves made transportation difficult, especially on the eastern coasts. In order to ensure the safety of sea transportation, heavy tonnage ships covered with tar were used. Trade ships could travel from Tabaristan to Derbent in seven hours, from İtil Port to Semender in eightdays, and from Semender to Derbent in fourdays, under favorable weather

¹⁴It is used for Jewish merchants who settled in Byzantium and the Caspian because of the Mazdek rebellion in Iran. The word means "the one who knows the way" (Gökçe and Tombuloğlu, 2018: p. 80).

conditions (Özdal, 2018: p. 188).

Conclusion

Between the 8th and 10th centuries, 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 security of the trade routes was provided by the Turks.

The geography where the Khazar Khanate was founded was located at the intersection of the most important trade routes of this period. After the 9th century, the peace relations between the Khazar Khaganate and the Abbasids opened the door to a new and bright period. By expanding its borders to the west and north, the Khazar Khaganate became the most powerful state in the region and took control over the trade routes in the north of the Caspian Sea. The Khazar Khaganate provided equal opportunities to all merchants, regardless of religion or race, by protecting their lives and property. The Khazar Khaganate applied commercial legal systems and a policy of tolerance specific to each religion.

The Khazar Khaganate in the basin of the four largest rivers of the region, Kuban, Yayık, İtil, and Don, Hashemites, an Arab-origin dynasty in Derbend, which is located within the borders of the Caucasus region, Arab-Islamic domination in Arran, Şeddanis in Barda, Shirvan in the dominance of the Shirvanshahs can be seen. It is known that there were Turkic dynasties in Tabaristan and Gorgan, Oghuz Turks in the Mangıyşlak region, and Kıpçak Turks in Deşt-ı Kıpçak region. The Khazar Khaganate provided equal opportunities to all merchants, regardless of religion or race, by protecting their life and property. The Khazar Khaganate succeeded in attracting the trade markets concentrated in the Byzantine lands to his own lands, with tolerance and commercial legal systems specific to each religion.

Thanks to the Caspian Peace, the country has turned into a region where artists, craftsmen, and traders come together. Muslim, Jewish, Pagan, Slavic, and Christian merchants who established trade colonies in the Caspian region were under the protection of the Khazar Khaganate. This environment of trust provided by the Khazar Khaganate was maintained by the Volga Bulgar State, which was the vassal state of the Khazars and gained its independence in 965. Caravanserais and gateways were built, and many cities were founded by the Volga Bulgars and the Khazar Khaganate. During the Middle Ages, the political actors that played an active role in the Caspian Sea constantly changed, but no political power established a tyrannical dominance in parts or all the Caspian Sea.

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 and the security of trade routes was provided by the Turks. According to the information we obtained from the sources; The ability of the Turks in military and administrative organization, 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.

The Silk Road, which lost its importance after geographical discoveries, has come to the fore again with the modern Silk Road project by China today. The aim of the New Silk Road project is to revitalize the world economy with a sustainable and new economic trade route between the continents of Europe and Asia. The Khazar region, has maintained its strategic importance throughout history. As stated by Ibn Khaldun, "geography is destiny." It is predicted that the Khazar region will carry its magical atmosphere with its fertile nature and authentic atmosphere to the next centuries in the hands of new power balances.

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