

**THE TRADE OF ARMENIAN MERCHANTS' OF IRAN WITH WESTERN  
EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN THE XVII CENTURY**

*Key Words* – Richelieu, Armenia, France, Levant, Ottoman Empire, Mediterranean, merchants, century, policy, commercial, trade, relations, city

In the mid-XV century, international trade gained an unprecedented domestic boost. While the main focus of the medieval trade was on the satisfaction of the needs of the upper class, which comprised mainly luxury items, since the mid-XV century the foundations of the so-called “contemporary” style of international trade were laid.

This period coincided with the rise of the Armenian merchant Khoja class. Already in the XVI century, the Levant-East trade seemed extremely limited for them and they began to seek wider markets in the West than the Eastern seaports of the Mediterranean could secure.

Reviving the traditions of the Armenian maritime trade of the Middle Ages, the khoja merchants loaded their goods on European ships, crossed the Mediterranean Sea and brought to Europe the Eastern goods (Iranian, Turkish, Central Asian, Indian, Chinese, etc.) rich in variety and quality<sup>1</sup>. Among these the Persian raw silk was considered the best and its demand increased substantially due to the significant growth of the silk-weaving industry in Europe.

In the absence of national statehood, deprived of any form of support, in conditions of competition with the European manufacturing countries bourgeoisie, the Armenian merchants emerged as an important link in the merchandise interchange between the East and the West in the XVII century.

The Armenian merchants involved in the international trade began to successfully compete with the powerful European trading houses and mercantile bourgeoisie not only because they had a monopoly over the caravan trade, but mainly because they were satisfied with the relatively smaller profits which was unacceptable to the European merchants. Furthermore, the geographical position of Armenia (bridging Europe and Asia), with the trading routes of international significance traversing over its territory made it a connecting link in East-West commodity exchange<sup>2</sup>.

An important factor facilitating the trade of the Armenian merchants with the European countries was the growing commercial competition among the European powers in the Levant. This situation forced the Armenian merchants to seek new, free markets.

To resist the competitive struggle unleashed by the European trade houses against them, the Armenian merchants continuously maintained flexibility in their dealings. For instance, in the XVII century, they followed the example of Europeans by forming

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<sup>1</sup> Ալիշան Ղ., Հայ-Վենետ կամ յարընչութիւնք հայոց և վենետաց ի ԺԳ դ. և ի ԺԵ դարս, Վենետիկ, 1896, էջ 503-504:

<sup>2</sup> See Papazian K. S., Merchants from Ararat, New York, 1979.

trade companies<sup>1</sup>. The Armenian merchants now had to adopt European business practices, learn the languages, study the local customs and traditions, and the banking and loan systems, as well as become familiar with the realities of the European markets, the demand for Eastern products in those markets, and engage in cooperation with European commercial companies and money-lending institutions. And, finally, they were compelled to establish contacts with the European rolling circles.

Due to the lack of security of human life and property in the East, the Armenian merchants usually kept their money in the European banks, which helped their trade activities to expand. It is known, for example that the Armenian merchants had major stocks in the famous “Banco Dolfín” del Venice<sup>2</sup>.

The Italian city-states, and primarily the Republic of Venice, were the oldest trade partners of the Armenian merchants.

The XVII century constitutes a period of decline of the economic and political influence of the Italian states. The intermediary trade with the Levant was drastically curtailed, and the majority of the merchants turned to agriculture. In the XVI century, the Turks had conquered the Greek holdings of the Venetian Republic, which resulted in a complete severance of its trade ties with the East. Under these circumstances, cooperation with the Armenian merchants became crucial for Venice. Such cooperation enabled the Venetians to obtain Eastern goods and raw materials, especially raw silk. It also allowed the Italians to resist to some extent, powerful commercial competitors such as the English, French, and Dutch.

The Senate of the Republic of Venice, in the light of the above consideration, granted numerous rights and privileges to the Armenian merchants, periodically reducing the customs duties due from them<sup>3</sup>. This privilege was granted exclusively to the Iranian-Armenian merchants.

The Venetian Senate records of the April 24, 1640 meeting state that “supporting that nation (Armenians) is greatly beneficial to us, since the Armenian merchants are engaged in large scale trade, and import to Venice a variety of Eastern goods, among which the most valuable is raw silk<sup>4</sup>.”

In another document, dated 1651, the Venetian authorities declare, “At present, it is our advantage to encourage trade with the Armenians, granting them broad rights<sup>5</sup>”. In other recordings of the Venetian chancellery, the Armenian nation was described by the upper house (of the Senate) as “thankful nation” (nazione Benemerita), “gracious”, “most likable”, “affectionate”, “useful”, “always profitable”, “meritorious”, etc. As a sign of amity, the Parliament of Venice decreed that Armenians could freely sell their goods at St. Mark’s Plaza without paying any taxes<sup>6</sup>.

At the core of the Venetian behavior towards the Armenian merchants was the concern that the Armenians could reorient their commercial activities towards other

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<sup>1</sup> See Զաքարեայ Մարկաւագի Պատմագրութիւն, Վաղարշապատ, 1870, էջ 131-132:

<sup>2</sup> Ալիշան Ղ., op cit, p. 126-138.

<sup>3</sup> Berchet G., La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia, Torino, 1865, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Ուղուրլեան Մ., Պատմութիւն հայոց գաղթականութեան եւ շինութեան եկեղեցոյ նոցա ի Լիւոռնոյ քաղաքի, Վենետիկ, 1891, էջ 215:

<sup>5</sup> Ալիշան Ղ., Սիսական, Վենետիկ, 1893, էջ 447:

<sup>6</sup> Ուղուրլեան Մ., op cit, p. 447.

competing Italian republics. One of the records of the Venetian Senate states that it is imperative to grant all kinds of facilities to the Armenian merchants, because otherwise, they would direct their goods towards Livorno or Genoa<sup>1</sup>.

Till the direct visits of the Iranian-Armenian merchants to Venice, the important Armenian merchant – khojas of Turkey and Western Armenia conducted active trade with this commercial city, called the “Queen of the Adriatic”<sup>2</sup>.

The Armenian trade in Venice enjoyed a solid period of growth from the beginning of the XVII century. Trade between the Republic of Venice and the Armenian khojas developed extensively during the periodically flaring up Turco-Venetian wars and of Candia, in particular that lasted over twenty-five years (1645-1669). The Armenian merchants had always been sympathetic towards Turkey’s adversary. For example, Margar Shahrinian in 1693 loaned 200 000 ducats to the Republic of Venice for the war efforts against Turkey<sup>3</sup>.

Until the mid-XVII century, among the Italian cities, Genoa occupied an important position in the intermediary trade between the East and Europe. A competitor of Venice, Genoa made every effort to attract the Armenian merchants, providing them broad rights and privileges. In 1623, Genoa even accepted the Armenian merchants’ suggestion to establish jointly an “East Indian Trading Company”, with the purpose of conducting trade with India and Iran, and shipping the latter’s raw silk directly to Genoa<sup>4</sup>. The company existed until the mid-XVII century.

The Armenian khojas also had significant commercial interests and a substantial volume of trade with the Italian port of Livorno. Armenians were among the first to import merchandise from the East to the cities of Tuscany, such as Florence, and Livorno, where they enjoyed various privileges and freedoms.

The Armenian merchants in Italy also conducted large scale trade with the city-republic of Lucca, with the dukedoms of Ferrara and Piacenza, the “eternal city” Rome, and with Bologna, Palmi, Fabriana, Forli, Perugia, Naples, Milan, Florence, Pisa, Padua, Turin, Bavia, Pistoia, Siena, Viterbo, Emilia, and other cities. A large number of Armenians settled in the seaport adjacent to the city of Ravenna, which was often called “Armenia”<sup>5</sup>.

It is certain that in the XVII century, Armenian communities existed in all the above mentioned cities. The Armenians who settled in the various cities and seaports of Europe had friendly and close relations with each other. Very often, members of the same family opened trading offices in several cities and seaports and were in constant contact with each other<sup>6</sup>.

The activities of Armenian merchants in France also were remarkably extensive. It is true that the hub of their operations was the Levant, where France, subsequent to the receipt of the capitulations from the Ottoman Sultans in the XVI century, gained

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<sup>1</sup> Ալիշան Ղ., Հայ-վենետ կամ յարընչութիւնք հայոց և վենետաց ի ԺԳ դ. եւ ի ԺԵ դարս, էջ 323:

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 428-429.

<sup>3</sup> A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVII and XVIII centuries, vol. I, London, 1939, p. 438.

<sup>4</sup> Ալիշան Ղ., Միսական, էջ 450:

<sup>5</sup> Macler F., Quatre conférences sur l’Arménie et les Arméniens faites en Hollande, Paris, 1932, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 40-41.

solid positions<sup>1</sup>. However, the Armenian merchants also visited France proper via the Mediterranean. In general, France was able to utilize the mercantile traditions of the Mediterranean with great success, and, thus, Marseilles became the heir of the classical Middle Age Italian cities' Levantine trade<sup>2</sup>. Trade through Marseilles was also conducted with Spain, Italy and Africa.

In the XVII century, the commercial cities of the Atlantic coast, especially those of Nantes, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, and Dieppe, gained major significance. The city of Havre, established in 1517 at the time of Francis I, later became the largest French seaport.

In the XVII century, France could not compete with England on either the ocean or the land routes. At the same time, the French merchants did not engage in caravan trade at all. Therefore, trade cooperation with the Armenian merchants gained importance for the French commercial bourgeoisie as well.

According to several sources, at the beginning of the XVII century, the Armenian khojas attempted to secure permission from the King of France to settle in all major French cities<sup>3</sup>. Having received such permission, soon they engaged in broad commercial activity and they became serious competitors for the native merchants. Based on their complaints filed with the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce, on December 10, 1622, the city hall decreed that captains of French ships be strictly prohibited from transporting any Armenian merchants or goods belonging to them to the Levant from Marseilles and vice versa. The order also decreed that the captains sign an affidavit, which obligated them to pay a fine of ten thousand gold coins should they violate the above order in the same year. The assembly of the southeastern French region Provence issued a similar decree in which it declared its solidarity with the Marseilles mayoral council. In addition, the assembly's decree mentioned that the Armenian merchants were prohibited from exporting gold and silver from Marseilles<sup>4</sup>. A similar decision was adopted in Toulon. The French authorities periodically continued to restrict the trade activities of their competitors<sup>5</sup>. The tenacity of these efforts brought the situation to such a point that the seaports of Marseilles and Toulon were closed to the Armenian merchants. One of the objectives of the French authorities' policy was also to hurt Turkey economically, because one of the most important foreign policy goals of Louis XIV was to close the Mediterranean Sea for the Turks<sup>6</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the closing of the French seaports was a heavy blow to the Armenian merchants. Specifically, it was harmful for Iranian-European trade, including the Iranian-French trade, because till 1664 France had practically no direct commercial relations with the Iran though France constituted the largest importer of Iranian raw silk. It is not accidental that the khojas of Julfa were among the first to

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<sup>1</sup> See **Masson P.**, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> **Tongas G.**, *Les relations de la France avec l'Empire ottoman durant la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Toulouse, 1942, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> See **Macler F.**, *Notes de manuscrits arméniens ou relatifs aux Arméniens, vus dans quelques bibliothèques de la péninsule iberique et du sud-est de la France // « Revue d'études arméniennes », t. II, Paris, 1922.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-13, 14-20. See also **Tékéian Ch. D.**, *Marseille, la Provence et les Arméniens // « Mémoires de l'Institut historique de Provence », Marseille, 1929, p. 14-15.*

<sup>5</sup> **Macler F.**, *Notes de manuscrits arméniens ...*, p. 22-41.

<sup>6</sup> **Missac**, *Le père ottoman : 1644-1676 // « Revue d'histoire diplomatique », Paris, 17<sup>e</sup> année, 1903, p. 365.*

engage in the Armenian merchants efforts for the opening of the French seaports. They also involved catholic missionaries, who were active in Iran. Thus, in 1628, the New Julfa Kalantar (mayor and provost) khoja Nazar was able to persuade the Capuchin Order member, Pacific, to mediate with the French court to halt the persecution of the Armenian merchants and lift the trade restrictions imposed on them. In return, khoja Safar who had influence in the Persian court, arranged an audience with Shah Abbas I for the French missionary so that the Capuchin order mission could be established in the city of Isfahan<sup>1</sup>.

Such mediation soon brought about positive results. Despite the fact that the government of France had already passed a series of laws aimed at sponsoring and protecting the French trade, which were applied indiscriminately to all the foreign competitor of France<sup>2</sup>, in November 23, 1629, the special order “patent” of Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu was issued by which the Armenian merchants were permitted to freely enter and exit that Marseilles seaport. However, the exception made for the Armenian merchants was not only the result of the kind gestures of Shah Abbas towards the Order of Capuchins, which was strongly supported by France. As mentioned earlier, the Armenian khojas played an important role in this. The essential point is that both the king and Cardinal Richelieu realized that in the area of Eastern trade, the main competitors of France were Holland and England, and not Levantine merchants. And, on the contrary, cooperation with the Eastern merchants was somehow even beneficial for France. However, the main problem was that none of those merchants had a naval fleet, and the weak French commercial fleet was unable to compete with the Dutch and English navies.

Therefore, a significant portion of the goods was transported from the Levantine markets to France by ships using the English and Dutch flags. This created some commonality of interest between the Dutch and English merchants, on the one hand, and the Eastern merchants, on the other.

In granting the “patent”, Cardinal Richelieu was guided by some political considerations as well. It is well known that Richelieu was considered a staunch supporter of the expansion of the influence of France in the Eastern countries. Therefore, he regarded Christians residing in the Eastern countries as supporters of French policy and tried to win their cooperation in every possible way.

As a farsighted politician with a pragmatic mentality, Richelieu placed great hopes in the merchant bourgeoisie of the nations of the East. He was, of course, well aware of the role that the Armenian merchants played in international trade and the East-West economic relationship.

It is not accidental that the Cardinal, who controlled French state politics, had plans to settle the Armenian merchants in the major commercial cities of France, particularly in Marseilles, where they could immediately engage in the Levantine trade<sup>3</sup>. Finally, Cardinal Richelieu realized that in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, the positive stance of the influential Armenian khoja class and clergy, the promoter of its interests, was an important factor in securing the successful activities of the Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> Pasifique P., Relation du voyage en Perse, Lille, 1632, t. II, p. 423.

<sup>2</sup> Розенталь Н. Н., История Европы в эпоху торгового капитала, Л., 1927, с. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Ա. Գ. Մ., Մասնակի պատմութիւն հայ մեծատուններու, Ստամբուլ, 1909, էջ 28-29:

missionaries. The latter, at the same time, were certainly the front runners of the expansionistic policies of France.

The 1629 license gave an unprecedented boost to the trade conducted by the Armenian merchants with France. In addition, the authorities in Marseilles began to charge them with lower customs duties. However, this situation did not last long. In 1634, due to the pressure of the French merchants, the Marseilles city council again restricted the Armenian merchants' trade<sup>1</sup>.

As a result, trade with Marseilles almost came to a halt. Thus, if earlier the Armenian ship brought on average 1000-2000 bales of raw silk and various other goods to Marseilles, in 1658, the entire amount of imported silk did not surpass even one hundred bales<sup>2</sup>.

However, as a result of the closing of Marseilles to the Armenian merchants, the Eastern trade of France also, in a short period of time, suffered major losses. Due to this reason, the situation demanded a review of the decisions and laws adopted by the French authorities regarding trade restrictions.

Cardinal Mazarin's administration, under the rule of Louis XIV (1643-1715), is identified by the development of a new policy, which aimed at strengthening the position of the French bourgeoisie. One of the components of that policy included the removal of restrictions imposed on the Eastern merchants<sup>3</sup>. This modification occurred because the competitors of France, Holland in particular, were able to increasingly attract the trade conducted by the Eastern merchants, thus, seriously harming both local French production and foreign trade. Antwerp, for example, was able to take over the raw silk trade almost completely, depriving French silk mills of raw materials and, thus, ruining the silk production of France<sup>4</sup>. Accordingly, France adopted drastic changes in its policy towards the Eastern merchants. They were again encouraged to trade with Marseilles. Chief Minister Jules Mazarin made great efforts in this direction, trying in every possible way to attract the Armenian merchants, especially encouraging them to do business with Marseilles.

The policy adopted by the French government was consistently put into practice by the prominent political figure of the XVII century, the Comptroller General of France and the then Secretary of State for Naval Affairs, Jean Baptiste Colbert. As the most successful practitioner of the mercantile system, he made every effort to enable his country to participate in international trade, establish model factories, step up the productivity of industry, and compete in the world market. As a result, he succeeded in expanding French industry and trade<sup>5</sup>.

Colbert's advisers realized that the only way to revitalize French trade with the Levant and the countries of the East in general, and compete successfully against the English and the Dutch, was to strengthen the caravan trade over Turkey. And this

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<sup>1</sup> **Tékéian Ch. D.**, op cit, p. 17-18. See also **Samuelian**, Les Arméniens en France depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours // « Le Foyer », III<sup>ème</sup> année, n° 35, 1<sup>er</sup> avril, Paris, 1930.

<sup>2</sup> **Macler F.**, Notes de manuscrits arméniens ..., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> **Aubrey A.**, Histoire du cardinal Mazarin, t. 3, Amsterdam, 1718, p. 333-339.

<sup>4</sup> **Lavisse E.**, Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à la Révolution, t. 5, 1<sup>ère</sup> partie, Paris, 1911, p. 270.

<sup>5</sup> See **Poulet**, Nouvelles relations du Levant, partie I, Paris, 1668, p. 434-435, **Du Mans R.**, Etat de la Perse en 1660, Paris, 1890, p. XLV.

could be done only with the help of the Armenian merchants<sup>1</sup>.

In 1667 Colbert prepared a tax index, a “tariff” system, which represented protective tax measures, and a whole system for imported goods<sup>2</sup>. In the sphere of Eastern trade, in order to successfully compete with the English and the Holland, in 1664, Colbert created the “French East India Company”, and in 1669, formed the “Levant Company”<sup>3</sup>. Thereafter, Marseilles was declared an open seaport (“Porto Franco”)<sup>4</sup>. In this regard, an edict issued by Louis XIV and Colbert stated that all ships entering and exiting the seaport of Marseilles be exempt of all taxes, and that the seaport from then on be declared free and accessible for all merchants and all kinds of goods<sup>5</sup>. Cities like Toulon, Dunkirk, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes, and others were also declared free.

Thus, the Levant – France trade route was once again opened to the Armenian merchants.

In order to encourage their trade with France, Jean Baptiste Colbert granted them privileges, which “no other Eastern nation and no one” enjoyed. Another important undertaking in the area of the expansion of France’s Eastern trade was the 1665 reorganization of French commercial consulates in the Middle East. Besides, in 1687, Louis XIV ordered the French consul of Smyrna to extend his protection on the Armenian merchants<sup>6</sup>.

There were several motivations of the French government for this new policy. First, weakened by the European wars, and the complicated developments in France itself, the country was unable to promote trade with the Levant. Also, France was unable to guarantee the importation of Eastern goods on its own. Therefore, the French concluded that the success of their trade in the East in general, and Iran in particular, depended exclusively on the cooperation and goodwill of the Armenian merchants.

The intervention of Louis XIV in 1671 in favor of the French East India Company resulted in the issuing of a new firman (decree) by Shah Abbas II, which granted the French citizens in Iran privileges and rights similar to those granted to the English and Dutch merchants<sup>7</sup>. However, France was unable to expand its trade with Iran subsequent to the above decree in part because of the 1672-1679 Franco-Dutch war. The main obstacle in the expansion of Franco-Iranian trade was the lack of a powerful commercial fleet; France was not able to compete on the oceanic routes with the English and the Dutch, and was compelled to use only the Mediterranean route, which also entailed serious problems. Apart from the competition with the English and the Dutch in the Levant, the French merchants did not have direct commercial links by the land route with Iran over Turkish territory, and were forced to use the intermediary services of the Armenian merchants<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Poulet, op. cit., p. 434-435.

<sup>2</sup> Виннер Р. Ю., Четыре века европейской истории, Москва, 1924, с. 81-82.

<sup>3</sup> Rocca N., La France en Orient depuis les Rois de France jusqu’à nos jours //« Aperçu historique », Paris, 1876, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup> Péricot Ch., Histoire du commerce français, Paris, 1884, p. 207-208.

<sup>5</sup> Recueil des règlements généraux et particuliers concernant les manufactures et fabriques du Royaume, t. I, Paris, 1730, p. 183-189.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>7</sup> Percy Sykes, A History of Persia, vol. II, London, 1951, p. 195.

<sup>8</sup> Poulet, op. cit., p. 434-436.

Thus, the Levant-France trade route was once again opened to the Armenian merchants. Although Colbert implemented a mercantile policy of protectionism and an active trade balance policy, in respect of the Armenians, as a rule, French customs officials did not diligently implement these principles. Apart from this, imported goods by the Armenian merchants were to be paid for only in cash. The English and the Dutch preferred to make payments by barter or non-cash arrangements, which were not beneficial to the Armenians, hence, the latter began to give preference to the French<sup>1</sup>.

Taking advantage of this friendly treatment, in 1687, the Armenian khojas asked for permission to open private trading houses in Marseilles and Bordeaux. In addition, they filed an appeal to establish in France an “India Company”, which would specialize in the trade with India, China, the Near Eastern Countries and the Levant. Under pressure from the French merchants, Louis XIV rejected the request, but the Armenians were, however, permitted to establish trading houses in the southern seaports of France<sup>2</sup>.

Colbert also encouraged printing of books by the Armenians in Marseilles, in view of the fact that it would reinvigorate Armenian trade in that city, and would also secure significant revenues for the French treasury from the books trade. Armenian books were widely distributed in the East<sup>3</sup>.

On May 6, 1669, Voskan Erevantsi presented a petition in Latin to King Louis XIV, in which he asked him to kindly accept an Armenian Bible printed by him in 1666 in Amsterdam. In the response, dated August 11, 1669, received from the King, it became evident that Voskan Erevantsi was granted permission to establish a printing house and to publish books in Armenian in Marseilles and Lyon or any other city of the kingdom<sup>4</sup>. These measures angered the French merchants who viewed Armenians, as in the past, as competitors. The French commercial circles even went to the extent of asking for the help of Rome’s inquisition, as a result of which the Marseilles printing house was closed down in 1683 after ten years of operation.

The struggle of the French merchant bourgeoisie for the interests of the country was so bizarre that Paris publicly emerged in opposition to Marseilles, whose merchant class had adopted a hostile position against the Armenians khojas. Famous Parisian personalities came to the defense of the Armenians. Finally, Louis XIV intervened in the affair. On January 3 and February 5, 1683, he sent to Mocalan his official in Marseilles two decrees, which restored the rights of the printing house<sup>5</sup>.

Armeno-French relations gained a new momentum at the end of the XVII century. In part this was a consequence of the naval battle of 1693 near Smyrna, in which the French inflicted a devastating defeat on England and Holland. The commercial fleets of these two countries in the Levant were largely destroyed. Thereafter, the French became the rulers in the Eastern Mediterranean basin, a development that had a positive influence on Armenian-French trade-economic relations, which continued

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<sup>1</sup> **Տեր-Աստավաճատրեանց Հ.**, Հայ վաճառականութիւնը Ռուսիայում, Պարիս, 1906, էջ 47:

<sup>2</sup> **Ալպոյաճեան Ա.**, Պատմութիւն հայ գաղթականութեան, հ. Բ., Գահիրէ, 1955, էջ 200:

<sup>3</sup> **Macler F.**, Mosaiques orientales, Paris, 1907, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Հայկական տպարան ի Սարսելլ // «Բազմավէպ», 1891, հ. ԽԹ, Յունիս, էջ 163:

<sup>5</sup> **Անասյան Հ.**, XVII դարի ազատագրական շարժումները Արևմտյան Հայաստանում, Երևան, 1961, էջ 190-193:



successfully into the XVIII century.

In Western Europe, one of the major commercial partners of the Armenian merchants involved in international trade was Holland. It was the first country in Europe where the bourgeois revolution had occurred, culminating in the first modern republic. After the revolution, in just a few decades, Holland's economic development surpassed that of other European countries, and the rapid growth of trade became especially noticeable.

From the beginning of the XVII century the Armenians established regular transportation links with Amsterdam, which already occupied a leading place in the international trade. The presence of Armenian merchants in Amsterdam gained greater momentum after the forced migration of Armenians from Eastern Armenia to Iran. The Dutch historian Van Emdre, relying on Dutch archival sources, wrote that in the XVII century, as a result of the invasion and partial destruction of Armenia by the Persians, they were forced to emigrate and some of them came and settled in Amsterdam<sup>1</sup>.

In 1612, the Ottoman Empire signed a capitulation agreement with Holland. This opened the gates of the Levantine markets for the Netherlanders to conduct free trade<sup>2</sup>. That agreement significantly boosted the trade of the Armenian merchants with Holland, particularly because Dutch ships established regular traffic between Levantine seaports, especially Smyrna, Constantinople, and the major commercial centers of Holland.

However, shortly after, a Dutch historian wrote, "The majority of Armenians were educated people and, besides their mother tongue, spoke Italian and French. They conducted their business with the Dutch in these languages"<sup>3</sup>.

Relying on Amsterdam city archival documents, A. Sarukhan<sup>4</sup> noted that since 1617, the Armenian merchants conducted major business transactions in the Amsterdam stock exchange. The most important evidence of this was provided by the Dutch historian R. A. Bekius, who stated that on the walls of the stock exchange, besides numerous paintings of foreign merchants, retailers and moneychangers, there were portraits of Armenian merchants<sup>5</sup>. In Amsterdam they also had their own market, which was called the "Eastern market" (Qoster market). The Armenian merchants formed trade companies with the Dutch on the partnership principle, with sharing of stock ownership. They also owned trading houses – in Amsterdam alone in the 1660s there were sixty such trading houses<sup>6</sup>.

In the light of the growing Armenian-Dutch trade, the Armenian community of Amsterdam also grew<sup>7</sup>. The merchants who were doing well brought their families along, and settled there permanently. Many married local women and were registered

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<sup>1</sup> **Van Emdre**, *Historisch Berigt van alle de Gezindheden*, Utrecht, 1874, S. 65.

<sup>2</sup> **Van Rooy S.**, *Armenian Merchant Habits, as Mirrored in 17-18 Century Amsterdam Documents* // « *Revue des études arméniennes* », N. S. P., t. III, 1966, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> **Սարուխան Ա.**, *Հովանդիան և հայերը ԺԶ-ԺԹ դարերում*, Վիեննա, 1926, էջ 47-48:

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> **Bekius R. A.**, *The Armenian Community in Amsterdam in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Integration and Distegration*. Paper presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of the « *Association internationale d'Etudes arméniennes* », Amsterdam, 1983, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Очерки истории Италии*, М, 1959, с. 251.

<sup>7</sup> See **Թաջիրյան Է.**, *Հոլանդահայ գաղութը և հայ ազատագրական միտքը (XVII դար)* // «XVII-XVIII դարերի հայ ազատագրական շարժումները և հայ գաղթավայրերը», Երևան, 1989:

as citizens.

The Dutch authorities were hospitable towards the Armenian merchants because after being liberated from the yoke of Spain (in 1603 the latter de facto recognized the independence of the Republic of Holland), the Netherlands experienced major economic growth. Its manufacturing companies, which supplied textiles to almost all of Europe, needed large quantities of raw material (silk, wool, cotton, dyes, etc.) a significant portion of which Holland acquired from the Armenian and Greek merchants<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the Armenian merchants conducting business with Holland were engaged in a large-scale exchange of goods between the Netherlands and other European countries, which was beneficial to the treasury of the state of Holland.

The trade houses of the Armenian merchants of Venice, Livorno, Marseilles and various other cities of Spain and their branches received from and sent to Holland large quantities of commodities. Holland was a transit place for the entire European trade of the Armenian merchants. The khojas exported goods by ships from there to the north, to the coastal cities of the Baltic, and in return imported other goods.

The partnership and collaboration between the Armenian and Dutch merchants started to expand significantly since the third decade of the XVII century<sup>2</sup>, first of all due to the trade agreement, dated 1623, signed between Iran and the “Dutch East India Company”. This agreement increased considerably the volume of trade with Holland and expanded the sphere of the activities of the Armenian merchants of Iran who at that time had a monopoly over Iran’s external trade under the Safavids. Another contributing factor to the development of Armenian-Dutch trade relations was Holland’s new dynamic policy in the Middle East. Based on the capitulation agreements of 1598 and 1612, between Holland and the Ottoman Empire, Holland gradually expanded its commercial activities in the Middle East. Its naval fleet appeared in the Mediterranean for the first time in 1617.

By the mid-XVII century, Holland had become the main source for supply of Central and Northern European origin goods to the Levantine markets<sup>3</sup>.

The Dutch were willing to cooperate with the Armenian merchants not only to acquire the Eastern goods, but also to defeat their French and English competitors. Another reason that the Netherlands was keenly interested in the European trade of the Armenian merchants was because the latter mainly used Dutch ships for the transfer of their goods from the Eastern Mediterranean Sea to the European countries. There is evidence that the Armenians themselves owned vessels which flew the Dutch flag, which they used to transport goods between the Eastern Mediterranean lands and Dutch seaports<sup>4</sup>.

In their quest for profitable markets for their goods, the Armenian merchants also penetrated such Western European countries as Spain, Portugal, England, Germany, Denmark and Scandinavian countries<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> **Wakjen H.**, Die Niederlander im mittelmeergebiet zur Zeit ihrer höchsten Machtstellung Abhande Z. Verkehrs und Seegeschichte, Bd. II, Berlin, 1909, S. 134.

<sup>2</sup> **Dunlop H.**, Source pour servir à l’histoire de la compagnie des Indes Orientales et La Hay, 1930, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> **Castries H.**, Les sources inédites de l’histoire du Maroc, t. 3, Paris, 1912, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> **Մարտիասն Ա.**, op cit., p. 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> **Gulbenkian R.**, Les relations entre l’Arménie et le Portugal du Moyen Âge au 16<sup>e</sup> siècle // « Revue des études arméniennes », t. 14, 1980, p. 171-213, **Գրուպենկյան Ռ. Վ.**, Հայ-պորտուգալա-

Although the Mediterranean Sea constituted the main pulse of the Armenian merchants' trade with the West European countries, the land and river routes were no less significant for them and were mainly utilized to travel from one European country to another. The Frenchman Pitton de Tournefort wrote about the Armenian merchants, "They not only were the masters of the Levantine trade, but also to some extent had a similar standing in the trade of major commercial cities of Europe. They come from the interiors of Persia, and settle in Livorno. Not so long ago, they settled in Marseilles. So, many of them are in Holland and England"<sup>1</sup>.

**Վահան Բայբուրդյան – Իրանի հայ վաճառականության առևտուրը Արևմտյան  
Եվրոպայի երկրների հետ XVII դարում**

Հոդվածում քննության է ենթարկվում Արևելքի և Արևմուտքի միջև միջազգային առևտրով զբաղվող իրանահայ վաճառականության առևտրական հարաբերությունները ուշ միջնադարում: Իրանահայ առևտրական կապիտալի ներկայացուցիչները իրենց պատկանող կամ եվրոպական այլ առևտրական նավերով Միջերկրական ծովով Եվրոպա էին հասցնում արևելյան ապրանքների հարուստ տեսականի: Սեփական պետականության բացակայության պայմաններում, զուրկ հովանավորությունից ու պաշտպանությունից, դրսևորելով մեծ ճկունություն, հայ վաճառականները հաջողությամբ մրցակցում էին եվրոպական առևտրական ընկերությունների և փորձառու առևտրական բուրժուազիայի հետ: Հայ վաճառականական դասը եվրոպացիների օրինակով կազմակերպում էր առևտրական ընկերություններ, որոնք, բացի առևտրից, զբաղվում էին նաև բանկային գործառնություններով և վարկատվությամբ:

**Ваган Байбуртян – Торговля армянских купцов Ирана со странами  
Западной Европы в XVII веке**

В статье освещаются торговые отношения армянских купцов Ирана со странами Западной Европы в период позднего средневековья. Представители армянской торговой буржуазии на своих собственных судах, а также с помощью торговой флотилии европейских держав по Средиземному морю доставляли в Европу разнообразные восточные товары. В условиях отсутствия собственной государственности и, следовательно, отсутствия всякого покровительства и поддержки, армянские купцы успешно справлялись с конкуренцией крупных европейских торговых компаний и могущественной европейской торговой буржуазии. Представители армянской торговой буржуазии по примеру европейцев создавали торговые компании, которые наряду с торговой деятельностью занимались также банковскими операциями и выдачей кредитов.

Ներկայացվել է 02.05.2019

Գրախոսվել է 20.05.2019

Ընդունվել է տպագրության 25.06.2019

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կան հարաբերություններ, Երևան, 1986, էջ 171-213: See also **Bayani K.**, Les relations de l'Iran avec l'Europe occidentale à l'époque Safavide, Portugal, Espagne, Angleterre, Hollande et France (avec le document inédit), Paris, 1937.

<sup>1</sup> **Pitton de Tournefort**, Relation d'un voyage du Levant, t. II, Paris, 1718, p. 158.