

The Significance of Routes and Commercial Centers and their Role in the Development of Qazvin during the Safavid Era

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Abstract: One of the problems discussed in the social and economic history of countries is the conditions of roads, highways, and commercial routes. The importance of roads and transit routes can be evidently witnessed in Man's social life. Undoubtedly, they play a determining role in commercial, scientific, and cultural exchanges. During the Safavid Era, several factors affected the conditions of transit routes and, as a result, the cities along these routes underwent certain changes. One of the cities that played an influential role in the trade relationships of this time was Qazvin. Since it was the capital of the Safavid Kingdom, the routes leading to it enjoyed great security, and the city itself had turned into the trade center of the country. While exploring the features of trade routes and the security dominating them, this paper aims to explain the role of important highways in the economic and social development, expansion, dynamism, and flourishing of cities, particularly Qazvin, which experienced such changes until the end of the Safavid Era.

Key words: Safavid Period, Qazvin, trade routes, important goods, urban development

Introduction

Qazvin is one of the oldest cities established in ancient Iran. At that time, it was located at the center of trade highways. This city is located on a vast plain connecting the East, West, North, and South of the country to each other. That is why it enjoyed particular importance in the old times. Regarding the strategic status of this city, it suffices to say that it was either on the way to or in the neighborhood of the capitals of Iran, such as Tabriz, Maraqah, Hamedan, Tehran (Rey), or Soltaniyeh, or it was once chosen as the capital city itself. One of the important characteristics of this city is its position south of the glorious Alborz Mountains. The route passing through the outskirts of the mountains connected the East to the West in the past. The purpose of this research is to study the trade routes of Qazvin which linked it to regions around it during the Safavid Era relying on its local and economic history.

Historical Geography of Qazvin

Generally speaking, historiographers and geographers consider Qazvin to be an ancient city (Mostofi, 1983, p. 773). According to a historiographer of the ninth century, "In Persian Qazvin is called Kashvin, which means an intended borderline or a borderline that is watched" (al-Baladhri, 1985, p. 80). Al-Hamavi has also referred to the same concept: "Qazvin Castle is called Kashvin in Persian; there is a mountain between Qazvin and Deilam where the Sassanid Cavalry protected the City against bandits and thieves" (1399 AH, p. 342). Some sources have referred to various names for Qazvin including "Shazshapour, Caspian, Kajvin, Bab al-jannah, etc." (Afshar, no date, p. 476). Because of the

importance and glory of this city, some sources read as follows: "Qazvin is in fact a big city with gardens and walls. There is only enough water for drinking; however, there are several gardens and farms which grow without water. It produces a lot of almonds and raisins, and many beautiful kilims are woven there from goat wool" (Estakhri, 1989, p. 166). Regarding the historical significance and background of Qazvin, Ibn Hawqal also reports, "Qazvin is a city with a castle and a Jameh Mosque inside it. It is the base of the Deylami Dynasty, and it was a fortress during the period of the Abbasid Caliphate where the caliphs fought against the Dylamites (1987, p. 113). In many sources, several references have also been made to Jameh Mosque of Qazvin; for example, "The shabestan (night-prayer sanctuary) of Jameh Mosque is one of the wonders of the world. It was founded by Amir Khomartash Ibn Abdullah Emadi, the Minister of the Seljuk Malekshah" (Qazvini, 1987, p. 201). "Qazvin is neighbor to many cities such as Hamedan, Rey, and Abhar" (Ibn Khordadbeh, 1992, p. 25). It also consisted of several districts in the process of its development and growth (Dabir Siyaqi, 2001), and there are presently several rivers (Lestrange, 1985, p. 237).

Iran's Trade Routes in the Islamic Period

A study of various regions of the Iranian plateau reveals that the central plateau of Iran was one of the largest prehistoric cultural regions of this country. During the ancient times, "The most important routes between Mesopotamia and the southwest to the northwest of Iran connected Afghanistan to China and passed through this plateau" (Majidzadeh, 1989, p. 165). The main roads, from the West and East,

were two military and trade routes which extended parallel to Alborz Mountains alongside the cities of Hegmataneh, Qazvin, Rey, Isfahan, Pasargad, Estakhr, Takht-e Jamshid, and Shiraz. The religious centers and human habitats of the country were also alongside the same natural linking routes (Girshman, 1995, p. 7).

A part of the old Silk Route passed through or alongside Mashhad, Nishabur, Sabzevar, Damghan, Semnan, Tehran, and Saveh, where it was divided into different routes. One of them passed Saveh and reached Qazvin from the northwest. From Qazvin, it extended towards Rasht, the Caspian Sea, Ardabil, and up to Shamakhi and Darband to the North or towards Tabriz, Soltaniyeh, and Miyaneh (Cambridge, 2001, p. 267).

During the later periods, European and eastern countries carried out their commercial activities through different routes almost all of which were very long and difficult to pass. These routes included the following:

Istanbul route from Trabzon to Erzurum, and from there to Tabriz

Caucasus route from Push to Tabriz

Volga route parallel to the Caspian Sea up to Rasht and Astarabad

Karachi route from Kandahar to Farah, and from there, through Herat route to Mashhad, Qaen, and Nishabur

Bandar Abbas route to Yazd and Kerman

Bushehr route to Shiraz and Isfahan

Other routes originating from the ports of the Persian Gulf

Some routes along some of the passageways between the Persian Gulf and Baghdad, and from there to Kermanshah, Shushtar, or north of Kordestan towards the plateau of Iran

Central Asia route to Mashhad (Lambton and Hillenbrand, 2007, pp. 429-437).

Importance of Trade Routes in Qazvin (Safavid Era)

After Shah Tahmasp I moved the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin and "made it his capital for the first time" (Jackson, 1973, pp. 499-500), this city was developed, expanded, and turned into one of the important centers of goods exchange. In order to stop the advancement of the Ottoman army in Iran, Shah Tahmasp used special military methods (Tazkirah-yi Shah Tahmasp, pp. 33-35). Therefore, the movement of the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin played an influential role in the flourishing of this city. The importance of Qazvin during the Safavid period was not only because of its being the capital but also because of the attempts to increase trade with Europe through the south of Russia. In 1561, Jenkinson referred to the presence of Indian tradesmen in Qazvin. Arthur Edward who traveled several times to Iran by sea on behalf of the Moscow

Company wrote in 1567 that velvet cloths and other goods were produced in Iran; however, they were not as good as European products in terms of quality. In 1564 a variety of spices could be found in Qazvin, but they could not compete with the spices that were exported from other places to England. In the report of the missionary headed by Sir Anthony Shirley, it is written that there were many tradesmen in Qazvin but they were often not very rich. Moreover, in the city there were several crafts men such as goldsmiths and shoemakers who made the best leather shoes in green, white, and other colors. "There were also some skillful artists in Qazvin who made gilt bows and arrows for matches, as well as some craftsmen who made colorful and gilded saddles for horses. According to Paul Simon's father, "Qazvin is mainly good for trade because we see an abundance of silk cloths, carpets, and brocade there" (Lambton, 2007, pp. 430-432).

In 1558, an English tradesman called Anthony Jenkinson entered Russia and succeeded in gaining the trust of the Tsar of Russia, Ivan the Terrible. Jenkinson visited different cities in Russia, including Xacitarxan, and decided to travel to Iran and India through the Caspian Sea (Tajbakhsh, 1993, p. 658). He followed two purposes in travelling to Iran: first, he intended to take the silk trade out of the hands of the Portuguese and have English tradesmen export it to Europe themselves; second, he wished to pave the way for penetrating India through Iran. Jenkinson stated that the reason of his presence at the court of the Iranian King was "to establish friendly relationships between Iran and England and seek permission for easy and free travel of English businessmen and people to Iran and buying, selling, and transferring commercial goods produced by both countries so that the fame of both Kings and the wealth of their people are increased" (Sykes, 1984, p. 241).

The attempts of Jenkinson, who intended to open a trade route through Russia, could be to the advantage of Iran because Iranian goods had many customers in European markets. These goods could only be transported to Europe through Tabriz and Aleppo, while similar attempts through using other routes had not proved much successful (Bellan, 1996, p. 134). In 976 AH, another missionary headed by Arthur Edwards came to Iran on behalf of the Moscow Company in Moscow. This time, Shah Abbas treated them kindly and granted the Russian company toll-free trade all over Iran (Mahdavi, 1985, p. 40).

The noteworthy point is that the itineraries of some travel writers demonstrate that the route they took was mainly the same East-West route used for silk trade. A glance at Nasir Khusraw's itinerary in the fifth century and the names of the cities he passed confirm this view. These cities included Marv, Sarakhs, Nishabur, Qumis, Damghan, Semnan, Rey,

Qazvin, Sarab, Tabriz, etc. (Nasir Khusraw, 1995, p. 51).

Therefore, based on previous research and even a study of travel books, it becomes clear that Qazvin was on the way of major trade routes, and it was even the point connecting some important regions. Yaqubi writes, "From Qazvin onwards, the roads to Hamedan, Dinvar, Shahrzur, Isfahan, and Rey separate from each other (1977, p. 46)." Furthermore, many reference books indicate that Qazvin enjoyed an important transit status (E'temad al-Saltana, 1984, p. 341) and a particular geographical situation (Nahchiri, 1991, p. 159). Katov stated, "Travelers go from Qazvin to the Ottoman land, Baghdad, and Basrah (1977, p. 95), and Kaempfer wrote, "They go from Qazvin to Saveh, Qom, Kashan, Natanz, and then to Isfahan" (no date, p. 7). In fact most travel writers acknowledge the strategic role of this city in connecting different regions and cities to each other. According to Afshar, "Qazvin is midway between Tehran to Rasht, Tehran to Zanjan, and Tehran to Hamedan (no date, p. 427). Particularly, during the reign of Shah Tahmasp, Qazvin was gradually developed and expanded and soon turned into one of the largest centers for exchange of goods. Figueroa refers to the importance of Qazvin as follows: "Qazvin is such an important city that when the Ottomans adjoined some of the states in Azerbaijan to their empire and looted the city of Tabriz, the kings of Iran chose it as their capital" (Figueroa, 1984, p. 261).

Some writers believe that the reason for choosing Qazvin as the trade center was its geographical location, which was far from the Ottoman borderlines (Hosseini, 1980, p. 378). However, this is not said at the expense of ignoring its commercial status. It is written, "Because of being located on the roads connecting the southern cities and states of Iran to Hyrcania and Media, trade caravans continually pass it, which has granted this city a significant commercial status. In 955 AH, when Shah Tahmasp saw himself incapable of defending Tabriz against the attacks of the Ottoman King, he had no choice but to move the capital to Qazvin. He found this city appropriate for residence in all seasons of the year" (Chardin, 1971, p. 511).

At that time, Qazvin was developed to the extent that several caravans traveled from many parts of the country there. Whenever there was no war between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, they used the Aleppo route or the trade route of Istanbul. Nevertheless, in order to stop the advancement of the Ottoman army in the land of Iran, Shah Tahmasp used a specific military method which entailed creating vast destructions around the attacking force and then exhausting it through violent and scattered counter attacks (Tazkirah-yi Shah Tahmasp, pp. 33-35). This method, apart from immense damages to the residents or farmers of those regions, resulted in the

roads' being closed and the difficulty of doing trade. In spite of all this, the tradesmen of that time, even by using the road that passed through Russia, imported several goods from abroad inside the country. They also exported many products to Europe by using the same route and sold them in important markets of countries such as Poland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. From a commercial and economic point of view, Qazvin was the point connecting the main North-South and East-West routes of Iran, and trade caravans had to pass through it. That is why this city had turned into a warehouse and merchandise center. It is written, "The outstanding commercial status of this city was such that it connected the southern states and cities of Iran to the coastal provinces of the Caspian Sea, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Chardin, p. 73).

After the reign of Shah Tahmasp, most of which was peaceful, foreign commerce continued even during the reign of Shah Isma'il II and Shah Mohammad Khodabandeh. The letters and the accounts of travels of the European tradesmen of that time, particularly those of Venetian tradesmen, are full of valuable data in this regard and about the general conditions of Iran in that period.

The development of commerce and political relationships were also on the top of Shah Abbas' program in his interactions with Europeans. The endeavors of Safavid Kings, especially Shah Abbas, in order to have this goal realized are given below:

Issuing the order of the development of commercial and political relationships between Iran and European countries

Supporting and expanding both international and internal trade

Developing urbanism as a by-product of the development of commercial relations

Shah Abbas also issued a special order to have the support of Christian tradesmen granting the following privileges:

Granting trading rights to Christian tradesmen all over Iran

Exempting Christian tradesmen from paying taxes in Iran

Not bothering Christian tradesmen or inquiring into their affairs and not controlling their merchandise (Salman, p. 133)

Given the vastness of trade and goods transfer in the cities of Iran during the Safavid period, travelers acknowledged that Isfahan and Qazvin were the abodes of kings, and there were several palaces full of suite and everything that was required for a good life (Della Valle, 1391, p. 56). Regarding the importance of Qazvin and its commercial status, Chardin refers to the following:

Qazvin is blessed with great peace and sincerity

The excellent commercial status of this city, which connects the southern regions of the Iranian Empire to Hyrcania (provinces on the coasts of the Caspian

Sea), Iberia (Georgia), and Media (Azerbaijan), has resulted in super abundance there (Chardin, 1971, p. 43)

According to Tavernier, "All places are good from Ardabil route to Qazvin" (1984, p. 76), and "Qazvin has three caravanserais" (Op Cit, p. 77). Moreover, he has spoken of the Muslim people of the city, and that there are just a very small number of Christians. He adds that half of Qazvin consists of gardens (Op Cit).

Apparently, the transfer of the capital from Tabriz to Qazvin granted even more importance to this city because the main southeastern and southwestern routes met each other there (Cambridge, 2001, p. 410). Kaempfer states that Qazvin is a very special city (no date, p. 111). Kavot has also praised the royal palace of Qazvin and its large gates and vast and smooth square which is surrounded by a ditch full of water (1977, p. 35). Furthermore, Della Valle provides a detailed account of the royal palace in Qazvin, which had attracted his attention. He speaks of the glory of the palace, its corridors, its large court yard and the plane trees there, and the King's court of levee (Della Valle, 1991, p. 291; Cardin, 1971, p. 35). All the above travelers have provided some particularly interesting reports praising the beauty of the palaces, architectural structures, mosques, bazars, and the goods in Qazvin, which testifies to the liveliness and dynamism of this city during the Safavid period. The Shirley brothers, while admiring Qazvin as an ancient and well-known city, maintain, "In the center of Qazvin, which is a noteworthy city, there is a place called the Bazar which has been constructed in the style of London's Market. There you can find any kind of shop for any kind of merchandise (Shirley, 1983, p. 83). They also report that there was a platform- like place in the middle of the Bazar with six columns. On each of these columns they sold decorative goods and other kinds of merchandise (Op Cit). Nasir Khusraw has also praised the good bazars (markets) of Qazvin (1995, p. 5). According to Savory, the bazars of Qazvin are three times bigger than the stock market of London, and there are shops for different types of trade (2003, p. 187). Shah Abbas movements were perhaps one of the main reasons for the affluence of Qazvin. This is because he travelled from this city to border regions or, on his way back, took the Farahabad route to Qazvin, Della Valle reports that the road from Farahabad to Firouzkuh ran from the North to the South; that is, it extended from Firouzkuh to Qazvin and then continued towards the West (1991, p. 286).

After visiting Qazvin, Della Valle wrote about the large square near its Bazar and praised its polo field, strong gates, arches, small palaces, and harem (seraglio) (Op Cit, p. 291). He also spoke of a grand bazar where the shops were full of foodstuff, clothes, and other types of goods. However, he added, "The

world-famous Qazvin is much less glorious than I expected it to be (Op Cit, p. 290). That he refers to Qazvin's fame all over the globe demonstrates that this historical city was truly known to the whole world. His reference to the existence of a variety of foodstuff and vegetables in the Bazar and a great number of markets, caravanserais, and gardens (Op Cit, p. 60) also indicates that this city enjoyed great wealth and prosperity at that time. According to Della Valle, "The residents of Qazvin, like those of any city alongside an important trade route, are often tradesmen and businessmen (Op Cit, p. 290). Hence, it was a market for different commodities and was on the way of caravan routes and international waterways (Cambridge, 1987, p. 476).

Qazvin also functioned as a storage place for merchandise which was supposed to be transferred from one place to another as well as for export goods and transit business (Op Cit, p. 479). Varjavand also states that this city enjoyed a significant political status because of its linking the eastern, western, northern, and southern routes to each other. He also adds that, with the establishment of new trade units such as caravanserais, markets, and caesareas, a diversity of goods from different places flooded towards it (1998, p. 186). Moreover, Chardin mentioned that the presence of the court in Qazvin resulted in the abundance of foodstuff there. He further mentioned that the great number of scientists and writers residing in that city had increased the fame of this city (1971, p. 47). One of the other signs of the importance of Qazvin was that it retained the title of Dar al-Saltanah (House of the Kingdom) for a long time. The other factor that added to its significance was the existence of some tribes around it (Op Cit, p. 365). It is worth mentioning that even after the transfer of the capital to another place, Qazvin still maintained particular affluence.

Commercial Goods and Products

As mentioned before, different sources have referred to the Qazvin of the Safavid era as a cultivated city and an important trade center. Tectander Vander label, who visited this city during the reign of Shah Abbas I, compares it with the German city of Breslau (1972, p. 49). The agricultural products of Qazvin were also exported abroad. According to Tavernier, "A great amount of Qazvin's pistachio leaves the country and is mainly exported to India" (1990), p. 77).

In his travel book, Daulier Deslandes wrote about Qazvin's bazaars (markets) and its products as follows: "There are some vast bazars in Qazvin. The main product of this city is pistachio. Many people live there, and they are mainly involved in trade (no date, p. 16). Della Valle also introduces Qazvin as "a populous and commercial city" and writes, "All kinds of merchandise are sold there, and there is an abundance of the necessities of life and different

kinds of cloth, and other types of goods there (1991, p. 709). Different types of fruit also grew in the large fertile gardens of Qazvin which gardeners transported to the city. Moreover, there were some big meat and dairy cattle on the pastures of Qazvin the products of which were carried to the city. The grapes of Qazvin were made into raisins and transported all over Iran (Chardin, 1971, p. 507). As Olearius writes, "Several deals and commercial transactions are carried out there, and tradesmen buy a variety of goods for a little money. Among the merchandise sold there were also rubies, amethyst, and turquoise (1984, pp. 156-157).

The variety and volume of the goods which were traded in Qazvin demonstrate that this city was the transport center of international and internal routes. It had some vast bazars and caesareas, as well as a number of caravanserais where commercial caravans stayed. The shops and bazars were full of a variety of merchandise, and the diversity of the goods added to the development of the trade industry in the city. However, the products of Qazvin for internal use included raisins, currants, almonds, and kilims. Estakhri writes that Qazvin produced plenty of fruit and so much almond, grape, and raisin that they could easily send great loads of them to other cities (1989, p. 172). Some others have also mentioned in their works the vine trees of Qazvin and its other products which were exported to other places (Ibn Hawqal, 1987, p. 113; Cambridge, 2001, p. 271). This city also exported clothes, socks, and bows (Kaempfer, no date, p. 160), as well as well-made cloaks; saddlebags, which were useful to travelers; different types of bows, and peppermint (Op Cit, p. 163). A part of the rhubarb crop which was imported from central Asia to Qazvin was exported to Aleppo (Cambridge, 2001, p. 271).

Among the other plentiful products of Qazvin as a trade center and important city, reference can be made to silk and brocade carpets (Op Cit, p. 378). Another noteworthy fact is that silk was the most important commodity of Iran in the Safavid era. In Qazvin and Ganjeh, 80,000 pounds of raw silk worth £200,000 was traded alongside green silk (Cambridge 2001, p. 224). British tradesmen could only present some considerable amount of cloth in return for silk, which is why such wholesalers resided in Qazvin, Tabriz, Ardabil, and Kashan (Op Cit, p. 225). As a result of the flourishing of business and increase in agro and industrial products, many cities, particularly Isfahan, Tabriz, Kashan, and Qazvin, were expanded and new neighborhoods appeared beside the previous ones there. The travelers who visited Iran during this time have provided some accounts of the urban population density and the affluent market of this country. At that time, the importance of business drew the attention of the governments to the security of the routes and the enforcement of some laws to

guarantee the complete safety of the roads. These laws allowed the rulers and road keepers to follow thieves or fine them (Soltani, 1983, p. 135).

One of the other factors leading to the affluence of Qazvin's trade centers was the presence of tradesmen from minority religions. The geographical location of the city, as mentioned before, had turned it into the crossing zone of various caravans, including the caravans of the Silk Route. Several caravanserais inside and in the suburbs of the city provided the opportunity for caravaners to establish commercial and cultural relationships with each other, took care of their commodities, and moved them from one direction to another one. This strategic status of Qazvin was rare, if not unique, among the other cities all over Iran. If economy and trade are viewed as two of the important motives of minority religion groups for residence in different places, it becomes clear why Shah Abbas I relocated Armenians to Qazvin, and why they accepted this forced emigration with relative satisfaction. After their settlement, they created the required religious and cultural (ethnic) conditions for living there and organized the social and religious atmosphere and livelihood options of their community in such a way that had rarely been witnessed until the end of the 18th century (Takmil Homayoun, 2004).

Conclusion

In the light of the Safavid rule and under the influence of some factors such as the security dominating Qazvin during the reign of the first Safavid Kings such as Shah Tahmasp, the consistency and centralization established under the governance of this Dynasty in this region, and the efforts of the people of Qazvin regarding the development of trade in order to satisfy their own needs, the way was paved for the growth and prosperity of trade centers, and extensive industrial and commercial activities were conducted. Hence, some of the trade routes enjoyed particular traffic and provided plentiful commercial benefits. It is worth mentioning that many of the cities which were alongside the main trade route played significant roles in the production of industrial and agricultural products.

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