

CIVILIZATIONAL FACTORS OF ARMENIAN SEA TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION IN THE 17TH CENTURY¹

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Prior to the great geographical discoveries international trade relations had been developing within the boundaries of the known world or *oecumene* [1] in the Eastern hemisphere, via land, river and sea routes [2]. Participation of various countries in the international trade depended on availability of raw material sources and product lines.

Armenia had been involved in international trade since ancient times, given its important strategic location between the East and West and its civilizational developments [3, pp. 203-227]. As far back as the Neolithic and Chalcolithic, obsidian had been exported from the Armenian Highland to Mesopotamia and regions of the Eastern Mediterranean [4, p. 46]. In the Early Bronze Age Sumerians made use of copper mined in the Armenian Highland [5, pp. 21-25; 6, 120-140]. In the Bronze and the Early Iron Ages metallurgy in Armenia allowed exporting processed metal products to the countries of the Orient. With high appreciation of Armenia's contribution in the world civilization, David M. Lang wrote in his book *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization*: "The ancient land of Armenia is situated in the high mountains... Although Mesopotamia with its ancient civilizations of Sumeria and Babylon, is usually considered together with Egypt as the main source of civilized life in the modern sense, Armenia too has a claim to rank as one of the cradles of human culture... Again, Armenia has a claim on our attention as one of the principal homes of ancient metallurgy, beginning at least five thousand years ago ..." [7, p. 9].

Existence of trade relations of the Armenian kingdoms with Mesopotamia, including the Persian Gulf basin, and Mediterranean countries, are corroborated by references to Aratta² in the Sumerian epic of the 3rd millennium BC [8], as well as to

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² L. N. Petrosyan proposed Armenian Highland as the location for Aratta, comparing it to the name of Ararat [9, p. 123; cf. 10, pp. 68-70 and 11, pp. 29-32].

Armanum, Hayasa and Nairi, correspondingly, in the Akkadian, Hittite and Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions of the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC. It has been testified by the Egyptian, Mittani, Kassite and Assyrian seals and seashells of that period discovered in archeological excavations on the territory of Armenia [12, էջ 64-65; 13, էջ 43-44].

City of Susa (the ancient capital of Elam, and later the winter quarters of the Achaemenids) in the Persian Empire [14, III, 140, V, 49, 53] and the Lydian capital Sardes in western Asia Minor were connected by the Royal Road that passed through southwestern regions of Armenia [14, V, 52]. From ancient times Armenia was connected with lands of Mesopotamia through waterways as well. Herodotus (c.484 BC – c.425 BC) provided information on navigation from Armenia to Babylon by Euphrates and Tigris rivers: “The city (Babylon – *E.D.*) is divided into two portions by the river which runs through the midst of it. The river is the Euphrates, a broad, deep, swift stream, which rises in Armenia... the Tigris has its source in Armenia” [14, I, 180, V, 52]. Herodotus describes: “The boats which ply on the river and go to Babylon are round, and all of skins. They make these in Armenia, higher up the stream than Assyria. First they cut frames of willow, then they stretch hides over these for a covering, making as it were a hold; they neither broaden the stern nor narrow the prow, but the boat is round, like a shield. They then fill it with reeds and send it floating down the river with a cargo; and it is for the most part palm (date palm – *E.D.*) wood casks of wine. Two men standing upright steer the boat, each with a paddle, one drawing it to him, the other thrusting it from him... When they have floated to Babylon and disposed of their cargo, they sell the framework of the boat and all the reeds. The hides are set on the backs of asses, which are then driven back to Armenia, for it is not by any means possible to go upstream by water, by reason of the swiftness of the current. It is for this reason that they make their boats of hides and not of wood. When they have driven their asses back into Armenia, they make boats in the same way” [14, I, 194].

Armenia’s strategic location in Western Asia had secured an important role for it in the global trade, especially in the *Silk Road* international system that has been prominent since long ago. Known for its urban development traditions, Armenian kingdoms experienced an upturn distinctly during the reigns of Sarduri I (845 BC – 825 BC), Ishpuini (825 BC – 810 BC), Menua (810 BC - 786 BC), Argishti I (786 BC – 764 BC) and other kings of the Kingdom of Ararat (Urartu) or Van, the Ervandians (VI - III cc. BC) and the Artashesians, particularly, Artashes I (189 BC – 160 BC), king of the Kingdom of Great Armenia, and especially Tigran II the Great (95 BC - 55 BC), King of Kings of the Armenian Empire. Capital cities Van (as well as Erebuni - the present capital Yerevan), Armavir, Artashat, Tigranakert, as well as other newly built cit-

ies (in Artsakh, Goghtan and others) also named after Tigran II the Great confirm the high level of the Armenian architecture coming since antiquity. Activities of Tigran II the Great, emanating from millennia-long civilizational developments, expanded over most of the Western Asia that was incorporated in the Armenian Empire [15, էջ 3-12]. Tigran the Great took the control over the *Silk Road* portion from the borders of India to the commercial ports in Cilicia Pedias, Syria and Phoenicia [16, XIV, 5, 2].

The early medieval Armenian educational and scientific system attached much importance to geography and cosmography. *Ashkharhatsuyts* (Geography) of the 5th century, authored by Movses Khorenatsi and later continued and edited by Anania Shirakatsi (Anania of Shirak) in the 7th century, informs about navigation on Indian, Greek (Mediterranean), and Vrkhanits (Caspian) seas. *Ashkharhatsuyts* data on natural resources and ethnic composition of India [17, pp. 266, 274, 308-310] confirm the existence of Armenian-Indian relations since old times. In his *Cosmography* Anania Shirakatsi provides interesting information about navigation by the stars. He writes that the stars called *Yerknibever* (Pole Star) and *Sayl* (the Wain) in Ursa Major constellation were visible pointers for the seafarers [17, էջ 96].

Along the *Silk Road* passing through Armenia such cities as Jugha, Nakhijevan, Karin, Manazkert, Dvin flourished in early Medieval Ages, as well as Ani, capital of the Armenian Bagratids in the 10th-11th centuries [18, c. 70-71; 19; 20], which were large centers of science, education and culture, crafts [21] and commerce.

Navigation among Armenians developed intensively in the 12th-14th centuries, when the Armenian Principality and later the Kingdom of Cilicia became a maritime state with navy and commercial fleet that was involved in the sea trade system of the Mediterranean [22; 23, c. 400]. Cilician Armenia was a sea gateway to the European ports for the *Silk Road* coming from China and India. It also introduced progressive changes to the international maritime law.

A number of European countries used to take advantage of *Jus naufragii* (*Jus litoris*) which allowed the lord of a territory to seize the cargo, crew and passengers washed ashore from the wreck of a ship along its coast. This law was also exercised in coastal countries of the Eastern Mediterranean. As Yu. Barseghov mentions, the Byzantine Empire had issued decrees in 1290 and 1320 protecting the shipwrecked Barcelonans, France did the same in 1227 and 1461 for Italians, and later for the Flemish, Dutch and Brabantians, but these were most of the times to no avail and it was impossible to prevent robbery [24, c. 100-101]. In Cilician Armenia the struggle against *Jus naufragii* was more profound and persistent.

In 1184 Mkhitar Gosh condemned this practice in his *Datastanagirk* (The Law Code), warning to keep away from that “if it happens that our nation possesses the

sea” [25, էջ 415]. Yu. Barseghov noted that from partial restrictions of the 10th-11th centuries to international agreements and conventions of the 19th-20th centuries, it took a millennium to eliminate the *Jus naufragii*. As the researcher notes in this regard, the clauses of Armenian *Datastanagirk* compare favorably to similar legislations of other countries not only by predating them chronologically, but also in terms of progressive contents [24, c. 95-98,103].

The king of the Kingdom of Cilician Armenia Levon II the Magnificent (1198-1219) struggled against piracy and applied great efforts to eradicate the *Jus naufragii*. First time the rejection of *Jus naufragii* took the form of an international legal standard in 1201. King Levon abandoned then the “right of shipwreck” in relation to the Republic of Venice, as he did earlier for the Genoese [24, p. 105]. Application of this legal standard in Cilician Armenia was further developed during the reigns of Hethum I (1226-1269) and Levon III (1270-1289) [26, pp. 106, 110, 126; 24, pp. 105-106]. Cilician Armenia was a law-abiding and reliable partner in sea trade, which is corroborated by numerous references in commercial documents signed in the European and Middle Eastern ports of the Mediterranean.

Armenian seafarer merchants also actively participated in the “Manila trade”, establishing business relationship with the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, especially after the discoveries of Dias and Vasco da Gama. Interestingly, back in the 16th century the Portuguese poet Luís de Camões wrote in his *The Lusiad: or, the Discovery of India*: “And those who cultured fair Armenia's lands, Where from the sacred mount two rivers flow, And what was Eden to the Pilgrim shew,” referring to the Biblical Paradise, sacred Mount Ararat and headwaters of Euphrates and Tigris rivers [27, p. 118].

The role of Armenians in the “Manila trade” grew in the 17th century. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French merchant and traveler, states that at the time “there was no type of commerce that Armenians were not involved in” [28, vi, pp. 158-159, Appendix, pp. 76-77; 29, c. 73-78], whereas François Martin, the Commissary of the French Government mentions that other than the Portuguese, “Indian and Armenian merchants were allowed access to Manila” [30, p. 125]. English documents recorded in 1711-1714 in Madras indicate that the Armenians controlled half of the Indian private trade with Manila and China. Having thoroughly studied the participation of Armenian seafarer merchants in the “Manila trade”, Yu. Barseghov has come to a conclusion that in practice, only Armenian merchant ships had access to Manila, because England, France and Netherlands most of the time were at odds with Spain. At the same time, the English, French, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish

made use of services provided by the Armenian merchants. Records made at Fort St. George of Madras indicate that vessels flying Armenian colors traveled from Madras, Surat, Bombay, Calcutta and other ports to Manila. Khoja Minas, Khoja Stepan Mark, Hovhannes Markar were among the owners of the ships traveling between Surat and Manila [31, p. 169; 29].

During the Ottoman–Persian Wars of the 16th–17th centuries the demographic and economic situation in Armenia deteriorated due to both destructive Ottoman raids and the “great deportation” forced by Shah Abbas I of Persia, when the ancient Armenian economic and cultural center Jugha and some other settlements were devastated. In order to enrich his treasury, Shah Abbas embarked on turning the direction of Western Asian trade toward Persian Gulf [32, էջ 325]. Out of his own interests, he awarded privileges to the Armenian merchants deported from Old Jugha to New Jugha, which was granted a right of autonomy. The problems related to New Jugha have been thoroughly studied by Leo, A. Hovhannisyan, L. Khachikyan, H. Papazyan, V. Baiburtyan¹, Sh. Khachikian and other researchers.

After establishment of New Jugha, using the silk trade routes the Jugha merchants’ or khojas’ capital [34] penetrated, on one hand, through Caspian-Volga basin waterways into Russia and further to Europe, and on the other hand, through Iran into India. In both cases sea shipping played an important role.

In the 16th–17th centuries the sea trade from Baku and Astrakhan was controlled mainly by Armenians [35, էջ 442; 36, c. 274; 37], and was further boosted owing to Armenian merchants of New Jugha as a result of conclusion of the 1667 and 1673 Russian–Armenian trade agreements².

The first signs of competition between the Armenian merchants and European companies surfaced when the Russian Empire, aiming to protect its domestic markets, revoked English East India Company’s privileges of maintaining connection with Iran through Russia. In effect, the monopoly to use this route for international trade remained in hands of the Armenian merchants. Meanwhile, Spaniards and Italians competed with the Dutch and English, whereas the neutral political stance of the Armenian merchants rendered an opportunity to cooperate with different parties.

¹ V. Baiburtyan, in his studies of the New Jugha Armenian community’s role in the 17th century trade relations between Iran and European countries deliberated also on the previous periods, particularly the Armenian merchants’ silk shipments in 1580 from the Persian Gulf to Spain and Portugal via oceanic routes [33, էջ 31-33]

² Sh. Khachikyan revised the traditional view that the Armenian Trading Company of New Jugha was the signatory of the 1667 agreement, and came to a conclusion that Stepan Ramadanski and Grigor Lousikov who signed the agreement were authorized representatives of the New Jugha self-governing bodies [38, էջ 24-25]. Her investigations of genealogical trees of the Armenian nobility settled in New Jugha deserve a special attention, particularly those of Aghazarian family, later named Lazarian, descending from son of a Nakhijevan native Manouk [39, VII]

Armenian-Dutch trade relations were most successful, leading to strengthening of the Armenian Diaspora community in Amsterdam which is known for its great cultural achievements, particularly in Armenian printing. For instance, thanks to the efforts of the Vanandetsi family, in 1695 the *Sharaknots* (Armenian Hymnals), *Hamatarats Ashkharhatsuyts* (The World Atlas), *History of Armenia* by Movses Khorenatsi and other publications were printed [32, էջ 616-617]. The role of Jugha Armenians' capital in the national matters has been remarkable over the centuries. Covering numerous Armenian centers in Iran and India, Armenia, Russia, Italy and elsewhere in Europe, this capital had much greater significance than that of mere benevolence. Several centuries of development of the Armenian scientific, educational and cultural cause among the Armenian communities in India eventually led to maturation of a plan (in the late 18th century) devised by Armenian patriots of Madras for liberation of the Motherland, both Western and Eastern Armenia.

According to Constandine Jughayetsi's late 17th century textbook *Askharhazhoghov girq*, Armenians were involved in artisanship and commerce in dozens of Indian trade and crafts centers [32, էջ 335, 337, 447; 38, էջ 11]. The use of "maritime loan" was widespread in the Indian sea trade, information about which has been preserved in relation to the Armenia khojas' capital [38, էջ 161-167].

The English, French and Danish East India Companies initially availed themselves of the opportunities provided by Armenian commercial methods and trade relations, especially in India. They made huge profits as Armenians initially tended to rent European vessels. The 1688 agreement between Khoja Kalantar and London traders' company guaranteed the rights and privileges of the Armenian merchants in India. Over the time Armenians bought and built their own ships, thus becoming competitors to the European merchants. For instance, two high-class merchant ships of Hovhan and Hovsep Markarians, "New Jerusalem" and "Sancta Cruz" fell victim to piracy [40, c. 62-69]. Yu. Barseghov remarked that the centuries-long history of Armenian sea trade is also a dramatic saga of a struggle against European piracy, as the Armenians promoted progressive principles of establishment of free seafaring and open seas policies [41, c. 35-42].

The fate of "Quedagh Merchant" is similar to those of Armenian merchant ships fallen victim to piracy [42, c. 70-73]. Discovery and study of its wreckage off Catalina Island, Dominican Republic [43; 44, pp. 47-49; 45] is a valuable contribution to the assessment of the Armenian legacy in the world history of merchant shipping.

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