ECONOMIC ENDEAVORS OF JULFA ARMENIAN
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ABSTRACT
With the transfer of Armenians from Armenia to Iran by Shah Abbas Safavi in 1604, a new era of Armenian life began in a part of the city of Isfahan, called "New Julfa". They immediately started their own businesses and developed their skills in various industries especially in the field of commerce. The present article which has been prepared using a descriptive-analytical method is structured in two parts: The first part deals with key word definitions and the second section discussed the most important economic activities of Armenians in Julfa. One of the most important results of the study is related the ability of Julfa Armenians to organize economic networks in Iran and countries such as India, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

Keywords: Julfa Armenians, Economic Activity, Khujaminas Company, Shahrimanian Company

INTRODUCTION
With the development of New Julfa in the south of Isfahan in 1605 A.D., a new caliphate was formed in the Holy Savior Cathedral for the administration of clerical affairs in the local community. In less than three decades, the caliphate of New Julfa became one of the most important Armenian Church caliphates in the 17th century.

The main reason behind the rapid growth of this caliphate was the placement of a number of learned Armenian figures in charge of the affairs. They cared for the development and progress of their country and benefited from the experiences of other nations which they had been introduced to by other Armenian merchants. Aided by their experienced merchants, they were able to pave the way for Iranians to become aware of the advances in Europe.

Traditionally, the Armenians had a flair for trading goods and making substantial financial gains. This had immediately caught Shah Abbas’s attention when he was in Armenia. He knew that giving Armenians the opportunity to conduct economic activities among the Iranian communities would accrue to the wealth and prosperity of the country which proved as yet another motivation for him to order the immigration of Armenians to Iran. Shah Abbas’s decision to order a forced immigration of Armenians exactly produced the same results, because after arriving in Iran and building the city of Julfa, they immediately got down to business and brought their expertise in different industries and also in commerce to fruition.

Armenian merchants in New Julfa were engaged in trading of all kinds of commodities. They sold raw silk, golab (rosewater) and rugs and brought different textiles, tea, spices, and jewelry from India and the Far East and brought different types of mirror, glass, clocks, woolen clothes, and gold and silver coins from Europe. In the long term, the money that the Armenian merchants brought to Iran accrued to the wealth and economic power of the government and the Armenian community in New Julfa and of course all of Iran. This attracted the attention of the Iranian authorities to the Armenian community.

During the rule of Shah Abbas I, business and commerce were controlled by the Safavi government and his business agents were largely comprised of Armenian merchants. After the king’s death, the control over commerce gradually grew weaker so the Armenian merchants organized and developed their activities free from the government’s restraining supervision. They immediately established economic networks in all of Iran, India, Russia, Italy, the Netherlands, France, the U.K., and many other countries. Due to their
commercial acumen and social and religious adaptability, they took over the international commerce, too. In the present study, the most important economic endeavors of Armenians including the Lazarians, the Shahrimanians, the Safrizians, etc. have been investigated during the Safavi and Qajar periods.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**a)** Review of the keywords

1. **Caliphate**
   Caliphathe were the ecclesiastical institutions which were responsible for managing the social and religious affairs in different Armenian communities. Caliphatess were headed by a caliph or a religious leader in their respective areas. Each caliphate was only responsible for its own geographical area.

2. **Shah Abbas**
   A Safavi king who was born in Herat in 1671 A.D. He came to the throne as the 5th Safavi king when he was 18 years old and remained on the throne for 42 years.

3. **Silk trade**
   During the reign of Shah Abbas I and his successors, silk was among the best and most valuable commodities of Iran and it sold very well in European countries.

4. **Sheriff**
   He was responsible for the internal affairs of Armenians in Julfa and served as the intermediary between the residents and the government officials.

5. **British East India Company**
   It was a joint-stock company which was established in India in 1600 by the order of Queen Elizabeth I to pursue trade privileges. Shortly, it took over the government and military affairs of India until 1858.

6. **Qajar dynasty**
   It is the name of a dynasty that ruled over Iran for 130 years from 1795 to 1925 A.D. Agha Moḥammad Khan was the founder of the Qajar dynasty. Other Qajar kings were Fath-Ali Shah, Mohammad Shah, Naser al-Din Shah, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, Mohammad-Ali Shah, and Ahmad Shah. Tehran was chosen as the capital city of Iran during the rule of this dynasty.

7. **Catholic**
   In general, Christianity is divided into three major branches: Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Protestantism. Catholicism is the largest branch of the three which means 'universal' in Greek. In this light, the Catholic Church includes all the branches of Christianity headed by bishops, in communion with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome.

**b) The most important economic endeavors of Julfa Armenians (in the contemporary period)**

Traditionally, Armenian merchants exported commodities from Asian countries to Europe and brought other goods from the European countries to Asia. At least 50 year before their forced movement to the center of Iran by Shah Abbas, Armenian merchants traded with India and the Far East via the Iranian cities of Shiraz, Bushehr, and Bandar Abbas. After the settlement of Armenians in Julfa, Isfahan, the Armenian merchants exported Iranian and Indian commodities to all parts of the world. Shah Abbas did the trading of silk through Armenian merchants. Armenian merchants received silk from the Royal storage and sold them in the European countries. In exchange, they received goods from the European countries and brought them to Iran. Then, they returned the price of the silk to the Royal Treasury.

The Armenian merchants in Julfa formed large trading firms to organize their business activities. These firms were made up of family members. The patriarch of the family became the head or director of the company which was named after him. The responsibilities of each family member in the company was determined by its director. These trading firms had rules and principles in place that every employee had to observe and they deemed them fundamentally immutable – always to be obeyed. When necessary, the firm members gathered and examined their budget and accounts.

In that period, the Armenian merchants conducted their trading via routes from Tabriz to the Trabzon port / Ezmir. However, the difficulties that the Iranian merchants were faced with by the Ottoman government, made the Julfa merchants to deliver their commodities through Russian territories. *Khoja-Zakar Shamiran* was one of the first representatives of Julfa Armenians merchants to go to Russia for conducting...
negotiations. He entered into negotiations with the government of the Tsarist Russian Empire in 1660. Gregor Lucy Keff and Stephan Zamadanski were two other representatives of Julfa merchants who went to Moscow to negotiate with the government officials of the Tsarist Russian Empire. Tsar Alexander Mikhailovich gave a sanction to Iranian merchants in May 31, 1667 to conduct their trades with Europe through a route in Russian territories. This route which followed through the Caspian Sea, Volga River, and Moscow, was practically unusable until 1670 due to the war between Astpatrazn farmers.

In January 7, 1671, the sheriff and 22 Armenian merchants of Julfa signed a letter and asked Gregor Lucy Keff to take it to the Russian Tsar and negotiate with him. In February 17, 1673, a contract was signed between the representative of the merchants and the government of Tsarist Russian Empire, according to which the merchants were allowed to trade commodities with Europe through the Russian territories (Khachikian, 1988: 21)

Iranian merchants who exported Iranian and Indian commodities to Europe via Persian Gulf ports, signed a contract in January 22, 1688 with East India Company in London. Accordingly, East India Company shipped Iranian merchandise from Iranian and Indian ports to Europe including England.

With the death of Abbas Shah who was the greatest supporter of Armenians, their freedom gradually declined in doing commercial activities. So, they were dispossessed of many commercial privileges and their areas of activity became limited to commerce, carpentry, jewelry making, and wine making. (Alboyajian, 1955: 135)

After the Qajar dynasty came to power, Armenians regained some freedom and also received the attention and support of Qajar kings. The number of Armenians working at the Qajar court increased during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah. Abbas Mirza was one of the supporters of Armenians. With his unstinting support, many obstacles in the way of progress for the Armenian community were removed. This paved the way for the Armenians to make their comeback. Due to a number of reasons such as an increase in the number of Armenians in government occupations, being in the favor of Nasser al-Din Shah and Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, and their efforts at establishing the Constitution, the past barriers to the choice of profession were lifted, enabling them to freely choose and follow whichever occupation they were interested in. After that, a group of Armenians inclined toward public services while the rest of them started their own businesses. There were many Armenians from all walks of life, but here we will only discuss those who were celebrated in their professions and left a legacy.

1. The Lazarians

The Lazarians were one of the most famous and wealthiest Armenian families in Julfa, Isfahan. Aqa Zar, the patriarch of this family, lived in Armenia. Later known as Khoja Manouq, his son Manoug, was born during the great immigration of Armenians to Isfahan, Iran, and his family took up residence in the Shams-Abad quarter. (Der hohanian, 1379:71.) After a while, he moved along with other Armenians to Julfa. Khoja Manoug had a son named Aqa Zar. Aqa Zar had four children namely, Nazaret, Valideh, Safar, and Manoug. Aqazar’s eldest son, Nazaret, named his son after his father. Aqa Zar III also took up trading like his fathers and became known as ‘Aqa Zar’. Amir Aqa Zar became one of the most prominent and wealthiest merchants in Julfa, Isfahan. He traded with countries such as Russia, Ottomans, and India. He exported commodities such as jewelry, pearls, sapphire, rubies, emeralds, silk, silk fabrics, cotton fabrics, rugs, spices and imported precious skins, furs, Dutch broadcloth, clocks, glasses, paint, home accessories, etc (Khachikian, 1988: 106)

In 1745 A.D., Nader Shah Afshar (King Nader of the Afshar dynasty) compelled Amir Aqa Zar to pay 5000 Naderi. Again, Nader Shah demanded and received the same amount of money the following year. Tired of Nader Shah’s injustice, he sent his son, Aqa Hohnans, to Russia. He evaluated the trade conditions as favorable in Russia.

Amir Aqa Zar moved to Russia (Idem : 103) with his family and all his wealth and took up residence in Moscow. There he launched a textile factory. Catherine II of Russia recognized Aqa Zar’s commercial activities as favorable to the economy of Russia and conferred noble titles on him and all his four children.
In March 30, 1877, the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II conferred on him the title of ‘count’ (Hovian, 1380:283.) Hohans, Aqa Zar’s eldest son, gained sensitive positions in the Russian government. In 1779, Khachator, the third son of Aqa Zar, erected the Holy Cross Church in Moscow. In 1815, Hoagim, the youngest son of Aqa Zar, founded the Lazarian College in Moscow (DERhohanian, 1379: 74) This college was for Armenian students and had four levels of education: elementary, primary, secondary and higher education. Armenian students from all over the world went to this college to pursue their education. The Lazarian College thought two groups of students. The first group was badly off and did not pay any tuitions. A number of Iranian Armenians (e.g. Madrus Khan Amir Toman) who attained sensitive governmental positions, were among the graduates of this college. Aqa Zar’s descendants became nobilities in the Tsarist Russia and followed their family profession for many years. They played a key role in the Russian economy.

The Lazarians had agencies and trade houses in the cities of Rasht, the port of Caucasus, Hashtar Khan, Moscow, Petersburg, and Amsterdam. Their most important area of business activity was with Iran. Armenian merchants in Julfa protected each other’s interests in other countries. Harotion Shahrimanian wrote a letter from Julfa to Harotion Lazarian and asked him for the protection of the goods which were shipped from Europe to Iran or vice versa via the routes through Sweden, Petersburg, Moscow and Hashtar Khan. Instructed by his father, Nazaret Lazarian wrote back to Shahrimanian saying that they would do it with pleasure; however, they would not sign a contract or receive any payment for that matter.

2. The Shahrimanians

The Shahrimanians business firm began its activities from the very early years that Julfa began to develop as a district. Morad I was a successful merchant who traded in Italy. He had two children named Nazar and Shariman who traded with Venice. Shahriman had two children named Zakar and Sarhad. Sarhad died in 1667. His daughter married a successful merchant from Julfa named Nazar Khaledarnts. He began five sons named Markar, Zakar, Michael, Morad and Gaspar. They traded with Italy, Austria, Hungary, Netherlands, Russia, Ottomans, Mesopotamia, and India (Khachikian, 1988: 70.)

In 1660, Khoja Zakar Shahrimanian and several other Armenian merchants from Julfa traveled to Moscow and presented the Russian Tsar (Alexi Mikhailovich) with valuable jewelry gifts. After some talks, he obtained the Tsar’s authorization for Iranian merchants to make their shipments through Russian routes. The sons of Zakar Shahrimanian traded with Basra and Kolkata in 1740s. They shipped Iranian and Indian commodities to Basra and exported other goods made in Venice such as mirrors, fabrics, paper, iron which were brought to Basra via the Mediterranean Sea and Syria to Iran and India.

The Shahrimanians innovated the cultivation of rice in the suburbs of Venice, as they saw the fields suitable for this endeavor (Khachikian, 1988: 72-3.) Venetians recognized the Shahrimanians as the pioneers of rice cultivation in their country. In 1696, Pope Innocent XII bestowed the title ‘roman citizen’ on the Shahrimanians. Hence, they were allowed to trade like roman citizens.

In 1699, Leopold I, the Austrian emperor afforded the title ‘Count Hungri’ to the Shahrimanians. Francois I, the French emperor, recognized this title via an order in January 24, 1817. The Armenians were repressed by Nader Shah. This led the Shahrimanians to leave Isfahan and spread out across the world. Therefore, the patriarchs of this family moved from their home country to Italy, Austria, and the Tsarist Russia. They gained special positions in these countries. The Shahrimanians had 50 servants and 100 employees in their trade houses in Julfa.

3. The Safraziens

Khoja Khachik Safrazian was one the famous Armenian merchants who lived in Julfa, Nakhchivan. When Shah Abbas was leading his army to Azerbaijan and the Caucasus to drive out the Ottomans, he stayed with this family as a guest for three days (Idem, 92)

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1 Evidence on historical relations of Iran with the Republic of Venice from the Ilkhanians to the Safavi dynasties, Central Library and Documentation Center of Tehran University, 1963, pp. 72-3.
After the arrival of Armenians in Isfahan and the creation of Julfa quarter, the Safrazians were appointed to the police court of Jolfa by Shah Abbas. The Safavid King had particular regard for the two children of Khoja Khachik named Nazar and Safraz and visited them often. The street where Khoja Nazar lived was named after him (Nazar) and retained this name for 400 years. The Safrazians had business relations with most of the European countries and had earned a very good reputation with them.

4. **Khoja Minas**

The Khoja Minas Company was founded by Stephanus. He ran one of the most influential companies of Julfa in the 1770s and 80s. There are many authentic written records of the agreements and contracts of this company. Khoja Minas Company founded a nursing home in Julfa and allocated an amount of money for the management of its affairs and administration of charity works. During the reign of Nader Shah – when the Armenians were subjected to extreme repression and extortion – many of the Khoja Minas family members resettled in India, China, Russia and Basra.

5. **Philip Dozagoli**

He was one of the Julfa Armenians in Isfahan who tried very hard to find new ways of trading with European countries. Among other notable issues is his conflicts with the Shahrimanians who were Catholics. The Shahrimanians did all they could to show him as someone without a known origin. In 1669, Philip Dozagoli found his way into the court of Louis XIV where he was held in great regard. In 1682, he got married to one of the relatives of the famous Tavernia Sayyah. In 1689, he moved to Poland where he tried to establish a trade center. He was awarded the title of ‘count’ by the Polish king. Later, he went to Iran as the ambassador to Poland. He went to Lithuania twice as the plenipotentiary representative of Iranian merchants in the court of Duke de Korlanda in order to find a safer way of trading with Europe. He asked the Duke to allow Iranian merchants to trade with European countries via Russia and Lithuania. Finally, in September 19, 1699, Philip Dozagoli signed a 22-article agreement with the Lithuanian Duke. (Golbangian,1351: 114) According to this agreement, many facilities were provided for Iranian merchants in Lithuania. The three-fold document on this agreement with Philip Dozagoli offers invaluable information about the countries which Armenian merchants traded with and also the commodities they exported. This agreement specified some of the Iranian commodities that were exported to Europe including silk, cotton, wool, tanned leather, wax, musk, rugs, silk brocade, cotton fabrics, jewelry and pearls. Eventually, Philip Dozagoli was killed in a plot by Catholics in the fall of 1705.

**SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

Based on what was mentioned in this article, the following factors can be regarded as underlying causes for the development and expansion of economic activities by the Armenian in Iran, especially during the Safavid and Qajar eras

1. Safavid rulers, especially Shah Abbas, knew well that providing the opportunity of economic activities for the Armenians could increase the country's wealth and power. Therefore, the Armenians enjoyed special privileges and situations especially in the political, social and economic domains. Having the same recognition, Qajar rulers reduced the problems faced by Armenians, including their occupational restrictions. As a result, during the Qajar period, the number of Armenians in state-run businesses increased and they were provided with more opportunities for carrying out economic and social activities.

2. The growth of world trade in this era, and the developmentist approach taken by Armenian traders, and their willingness for European cultural patterns on the other hand, led to the establishment of large commercial firms by Armenians.

3. Characteristics such as diligence, seriousness, and access to trade information and the world market situation, and most importantly, the connection that Armenian businessmen established in this era with the outside world, could be considered as another factor in the development of Armenian economy.

4. Familiarity with foreign languages, which provided a special opportunity for Armenian merchants, and their ideological and cultural similarities with the European people, should also be added to these factors.
Therefore, it can be said that given the fact that during the years of their economic activities, the Armenians had gained valuable experience and got familiar with ups and downs of the world of trade, during this period they were able to make huge fortunes and reach high economic power.

CONCLUSION
The research findings show that following resettlement in Julfa and making the necessary arrangements, the Armenians paved the path to progress in their new community. The establishment of a caliphate and the appointment of learned individuals in charge of affairs, facilitated the movement of this country toward progress in many respects.

One of the most important advances was in the field of trade and commerce. With their natural talent on the one side, and the development of suitable conditions on the other side, the Armenians outshone others and attained high positions. The Lazarians, the Shahrimanians, the Safrzians, etc. are of the most prominent of the hundreds of Armenian merchants.

The research findings also show that these companies did not limit their domains of activity within the boundaries of Iran. These famed merchants effectively organized their economic activities and established economic networks in all of Iran, India, Russia, Italy, the Netherlands, France, the U.K., and many other countries. The economic and commercial qualifications of Armenians over the centuries – as corroborated by valid resources – could serve as a reliable platform for tapping into the potentials of Armenians.

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