

Armenian merchants in Armenia in the Early Modern Period

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From the beginning of 16th century the Armenian trade capital revived in the middle valley of Araxes river to the east of the town Nakhichevan under the rule of Safavid state. Jugha, Shahkert (Ghazanchi), Shorot, Tsghna, Dasht, Dastak, Agulis, Meghri, Kaler, etc, located in the small region between the mountain chain of Syunik and the left bank of Araxes, were the settlements from where the Armenian khojas developed their trade activities, connecting various commercial centres of the world with one another.

In spite of the frequent Turkish-Persian wars causing heavy destructions to the Armenian settlements, some of them preserved their commercial role through 16th-18th centuries and were wellknown also for their manufactural products and crafts. The lecture will contain a review of the commercial and other activities of the Armenians in the region on the whole, with a more detailed analysis performed on the basis of the Armenian and Persian sources referring to Agulis in 17th -18th centuries.

The sources of 16th-18th centuries witness that there were Armenian khojas likewise in Yerevan and Karabagh regions, who combined commercial activities with administrative positions and held land property. The data and information referring to the Armenian khojas of Eastern Armenia available in the sources and considered in the lecture will draw some aspects of their commercial, administrative activities, and their position under Persian rule.

The trade of Armenians in the villages subject to Armenian meliks was under their straight control, which is evident from the presence of their seals in the shar'ia notarial documents on various commercial dealings. The rights of the meliks in this respect are fixed likewise in the royal decrees granted to them by Safavid shahs. Meliks were often engaged in commercial dealings, which sometimes was the main source of their wealth.