

THE ROLE OF TRADE AMONG HISTORICAL FACTORS SHAPING ASIA'S CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. This article explores the critical role of trade relations, particularly along the Great Silk Road, in shaping cultural development across regions. Using Azerbaijan as a focal point, the study demonstrates how commercial routes facilitated not only economic exchange but also the dissemination of knowledge, literature, architecture, and religious traditions. The paper highlights the transmission of Azerbaijani literary works, especially those by Nizami Ganjavi, and the architectural influence of Ajami Nakhchivani through trade caravans. Particular attention is paid to the function of caravanserais, bridges, and urban centers in fostering intercultural communication and the growth of city life. Drawing on historical sources, archaeological evidence, and academic scholarship, the study emphasizes the interconnectedness of trade and cultural progress. It argues that Azerbaijan's strategic position on ancient trade routes allowed it to become both a recipient and a transmitter of rich cultural influences between East and West. The research contributes to broader discussions on cultural globalization in historical contexts.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, history, culture, Silk Road, archaeological evidence, trade.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the relationship between trade and culture offers new insights into the processes of historical development, intercultural exchange, and the formation of civilizational identity. The present article investigates the role of trade relations, particularly those established along the Great Silk Road, in the development and dissemination of cultural values, architectural traditions, literary heritage, and social practices across Eastern and Western regions.

The relevance of this research lies in the growing scholarly interest in cultural globalization and historical mechanisms of intercultural communication. In the context of modern integration processes, the historical experience of cultural interaction via trade routes becomes especially significant for understanding the roots of mutual influence between societies.

The novelty of the study consists in its focus on the cultural function of trade networks through the example of Azerbaijan, which served as a strategic hub between Europe and Asia. Based on historical sources, travel accounts, and architectural analysis, the article highlights the role of medieval Azerbaijani cities, caravanserais, and intellectual figures in the broader context of East-West relations.

The main objective of the research is to demonstrate how economic exchange through trade routes not only contributed to material development but also became a powerful instrument of cultural transfer, shaping identities, values, and historical memory across regions.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employs a historical-comparative method to analyze the cultural impact of trade relations along the Great Silk Road. The approach is based on a systematic examination of archival materials, medieval written sources, and travel accounts from both Eastern and Western authors. The comparative aspect allows for the identification of cultural parallels and mutual influences among the regions connected by trade routes, particularly focusing on the territories of Azerbaijan.

A significant part of the research is dedicated to the analysis of architectural monuments – caravanserais, bridges, and urban structures – located along the ancient trade routes. Architectural analysis is used to trace stylistic influences and construction techniques that spread through commercial exchange. The study also considers literary sources, such as works by Nizami Ganjavi and Abdurrahman Jami, as evidence of cultural transfer facilitated by the book trade and intellectual exchange along trade caravans.

Primary sources include medieval Arabic, Persian, and Turkic chronicles, as well as geographic and diplomatic descriptions by travelers such as Ibn Hawqal. Secondary sources consist of scholarly research by Azerbaijani historians and architects (e.g., Salamzadeh, Mammadzadeh, Qiyasi), which provide theoretical and empirical support for interpreting the data. Together, these materials form the empirical foundation for reconstructing the multidimensional role of trade in shaping the cultural landscape of medieval Azerbaijan.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

THE ROLE OF TRADE RELATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL RELATIONS

One of the most important aspects of the Great Silk Road, which played an important role in the economic and political life of the countries it passed through for a long time, is related to its irreplaceable influence on the development of culture in those regions. This road has been a route of trade, culture and sometimes wars. This road was used to spread the literature, science, education, culture, especially urban culture, religions, etc. The travel notes and works of travelers, scientists, diplomats, missionaries, government officials who came from the West and the East along that road contain valuable information for studying the history of culture. It should be noted that, unlike the modern era, during the Middle Ages, East-West relations developed more on economic and cultural grounds. Today, relations are often political in nature.¹ At the time of Alexander the Great, the Hellenistic culture emerged, blending Eastern and Western elements. Later, after the spread of Islam, many of the routes across the Arabian Peninsula, which had previously been used only as trade routes — were transformed into the “Hajj Road,” as pilgrims joined the caravans. These developments created conditions for economic relations to evolve into economic and cultural exchanges. After the Crusades, contacts between East and West increased significantly. Eastern words and tales were rapidly mixed with western languages.² Therefore, the main essence of the Great Silk Road was the cultural direction of the East to the West. At that time, apart from the culture of Ancient Rome and Greece, the awakening had just begun in Europe. The caravans, which started from the Far East - Korea, passed through China, Mongolia, Central Asia, Azerbaijan to the shores of the Mediterranean and Black seas, and to the interior of Europe. At the same time, the Great Silk Road played a significant role in the expansion of literary relations in the transfer of silk and paper manuscripts and literary samples from one country to another. The works written by Azerbaijani thinkers in the 8th-11th centuries in Arabic, and then in Persian and Turkish, which were the languages of poetry in the Middle East, were widely spread in Central Asia, Arab countries, Iran, India and Europe. As a result of this book trade and exchange, the great Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi's "Khamsa" gained great fame throughout the Eastern countries. Undoubtedly, Nizami's works were carried by caravans traveling along the Great Silk Road and spread to many nearby and distant lands. At the same time, those caravans brought the scientific and literary achievements of other countries to Azerbaijan. Without the works from various fields of science brought from Eastern countries, Nizami Ganjavi might not have been so well acquainted with the natural conditions of Europe and Asia, nor able to deeply understand the ethnic diversity of different peoples. Alexander the Great could not be depicted in “Iskandernama” amid subtropical, sometimes desert, sometimes field, sometimes forest landscape without reflecting the cultural and natural contexts familiar to the region.³ It is no coincidence that after the XII century, all Eastern authors who addressed the subject and wrote about Alexander called themselves the successors of Nizami's legacy and were proud of being disciples of the great master. In general, the influence of the great master can be seen in the works of most of the Eastern poets who lived after Nizami.

One of the outstanding representatives of the Nizami poetic school was Abdurrahman Jami, a classic of Persian-Tajik literature. A. Jami, who was a fan of the artistic and philosophical genius of the great Ganja thinker, in exchange for “Makhzanul-asrar” (“Treasure of Secrets”) included in “Khamsa”, “Tohfatul-ahrar”, “Khosrov and Shirin” in exchange for “Yusif and Zuleikha”, “Leyli and Majnun” in exchange for the poem of the same name, and in exchange for “Iskandernama” he wrote “Kharednameye Iskandari”.⁴ These laconic comparisons show the influence of Nizami's artistic and philosophical genius and indicate the development of Azerbaijani literary relations. Of course, during that period, the only means of establishing literary relations between countries were the trade caravans traveling along the international routes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADE ROUTES IN THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLE ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF OTHER EASTERN COUNTRIES

The observation of the medieval architectural style in the architecture of other Eastern countries, the residence of prominent artists, scientists and architects in caravanserai at various times had a great impact on the development of mutual cultural relations. The influence of the heritage of Nakhchivani, the founder of the Nakhchivan school of medieval Azerbaijani architecture, Ajami Abubakr oglu, on the architecture of the Near and Middle East was by no means accidental. It emerged as a result of the cultural relations between those countries with Azerbaijan, including Nakhchivan. As a result of these relations, under the influence of Ajami's genius, magnificent examples of

¹ Khalilov, p. 109.

² Oldenburg, p. 33.

³ Shiraliyev, p. 24.

⁴ Alizadeh, p.4

architecture were built in a number of countries of the Near and Middle East and were included in the world cultural treasure. It is no coincidence that when talking about the sphere of influence of the Nakhchivan school of architecture, academicians A.Salamzadeh and K.Mammadzadeh highlight the prominent Turkish architect Sinan. A direct connection to Nakhchivan tombs is evident in a series of tombs erected by Sinan in Istanbul in the XVI century. Talking about the influence of Nakhchivan monuments on Sinan, scientists have come to the conclusion that architect Sinan came to Azerbaijan as an architect of janissary troops during Sultan Suleyman Qanuni's marches to Azerbaijan (1535-1536), and at that time he got acquainted with Nakhchivan monuments.⁵ It is known that during his marches to Azerbaijan, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent visited mountains, valleys, swamps, etc. he moved not on impassable paths, but along the established trade routes of that time, and occupied the cities situated along those routes. Architect Sinan also came to Nakhchivan by the same route and saw the rich products of Ajami Nakhchivani's creativity.

Despite the strong influence of the Turkmenistan monument, the structure of the Kazan Khan tomb was more similar to the Azerbaijani tower-shaped tombs. The vault and tower-shaped structure made it similar to the Maragha and Nakhchivan tombs of the 11th-12th centuries.⁶

Architects, weavers, artisans and other craftsmen who lived and worked in the territory of Azerbaijan became renowned for their skill, earning recognition both in neighboring and distant countries.

Built in the 70s of the 14th century in the old city of Organj, Turkmenistan, the mausoleum of Mrs. Turebek is a magnificent medieval monument distinguished by its refined style. Some researchers, noting the stylistic similarities, assume that Azerbaijani craftsmen were directly involved in the decoration of Mrs.Turebek's mausoleum. According to the correspondent member of ANAS, J.Qiyasi, the beautiful marble decoration of this rare Khwarazm monument was undoubtedly created in the environment of close cultural relations with Azerbaijan, since this decorative technique first appeared in Azerbaijan.⁷

This culture, of course, was created by the people living in the region, the ancient ancestors of today's Azerbaijanis. However, it is impossible to view this culture in isolation from the culture of its close neighbors, for example, Georgia, the peoples of the North Caucasus, as well as the peoples of distant India, Iran, and Central Asia, who maintained continuous contact through the caravan routes. As Azerbaijan was influenced by these countries and peoples, it also exerted its influence on them.⁸ One of the main aspects of this mutual exchange along the Great Silk Road was the ever-developing culture of urban planning and architecture. It is likely that the creation of cities was directly related to the development of crafts and trade. If we look at the middle cities with famous bazaars, fairs and caravanserais, we can see that those cities were able to develop and become famous precisely because they served as important stations along the international caravan routes. The medieval cities of Nakhchivan also belong to this type of cities.

As is known, the most important routes of the Silk Road stretching from East to West passed through the territory of Azerbaijan. Those roads were not an addition to international trade routes, but a part of it. Since ancient times, the country's favorable geographic position for the implementation of international economic and cultural exchange has contributed to the development of Azerbaijani cities and the flourishing of trade relations throughout the region.

MATERIAL AND CULTURAL MONUMENTS SERVING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE RELATIONS

Such monuments were built in all parts of Azerbaijan, located at the junction of important trade routes connecting Europe and Asia, to develop domestic and international trade. Thus, in order to overcome the difficulties faced by the trade caravans, bridges were built over the rivers, water wells were dug on the roads to meet the water needs of the caravan members, and guard posts were created for the safety of the caravans. One of the most important measures implemented in order to develop trade was the establishment of caravanserais in residential areas, within a day's distance of trade routes.⁹ Caravanserais were buildings designed to provide rest and recreation of tired caravans after long journeys. Here, the animals belonging to the caravans were fed and rested, while the people of the caravan themselves also took rest. Also, trade and exchange of goods with merchants from other regions took place within the caravanserais. The caravan had to travel long and difficult roads. It was more dangerous to move at night. Thus, they began to build special "palaces" - caravanserais, far away from cities and villages - in the deserts and steppes along the caravan routes.

⁵ Salamzade and Mammadzade, p. 63.

⁶ Qiyasi, p. 44.

⁷ Qiyasi, p. 42.

⁸ Gubatoglu, p. 140.

⁹ Miller, p. 99.

Caravanserais have an ancient history, dating back as far as the culture and trade of Eastern countries themselves. The Greek historian Herodotus, describing the roads in his work "History", mentioned beautiful guest houses at distances of about 30-40 kilometers.¹⁰

Historical sources show that the importance of caravanserais in the early periods was different from the later periods. For example, during the Roman era, caravanserais mainly served to ensure the safe and comfortable travel of Roman officials, so that monument belonged only to the upper classes. These caravanserais were spacious and elegantly furnished, with rooms richly carpeted and equipped with every necessary item.

During the Byzantine Empire, the distance between caravanserais on major roads was 50 kilometers. They were so comfortable and beautiful that even kings and rulers could comfortably stay in those caravanserais. Up to 400 horses were kept in each caravanserai, which served to replace the tired horses of the messengers who brought news to the emperor, the messengers who carried out their orders, and the officials.

Caravanserais are found not only in the Mediterranean and Eastern countries, but also in the Mongolian homeland, where the construction of these buildings was learned from the Chinese, as well as other regions. Historical sources show that the largest and most beautiful caravanserai was built by the Seljuk rulers. The Seljuk rulers also provided refuge and protection to Iranian scientists and artists who fled from the Mongols in those buildings.

During the Middle Ages, caravanserais were built on the main transit roads in Azerbaijan. Sources indicate that Shah Abbas built 999 caravanserais in those areas.¹¹ It is worth noting that a legend still alive among the local population in Nakhchivan mentions the construction of 999 caravanserais in the territory of the Safavid state during the reign of Shah Abbas I. The choice of the number 999 instead of 1000 is believed to make the figure sound more glorious. As in other parts of Azerbaijan, some of these caravanserais have survived to this day in the Nakhchivan region.

Merchants from different countries and cities stayed in caravanserais, which were mainly places where wholesale trade was conducted. Caravanserais were usually located near market squares. Merchants of different countries had their caravanserais in particularly important trade centers. Almost all the travelers who visited the Safavid state in the 17th century emphasized that the caravanserais in those states were the most convenient for trade and the most beautiful buildings in the East. Caravanserais were considered the safest places for merchant goods in cities.¹²

In contrast to the ancient times, starting from the Middle Ages, caravanserais served more merchants and travelers. After realizing the state importance of trade, not only were better conditions provided for merchants, but also guards were organized for their safety.

After the spread of Islam and the formation of large pilgrimage caravans to the holy lands of Islam, caravanserais were built as religious institutions not only by rulers, but also by wealthy merchants. In the religious caravanserais, every traveler could stay free of charge. Caravanserais were equipped with baths, bazaars, cells, and other buildings, forming a large complex. To meet the religious needs of Muslim travelers, mosques and places of worship were built within the caravanserais.¹³

Caravanserais, which have a history of about 4000 years and were a place for caravans to stop, were hotel-type buildings. These large complexes included rooms where travelers could rest and spend the night, canteens for feeding, stables for riding and pack animals, and mangers for their feeding. They also included warehouses for storing goods, shops for trading, and places of worship. Additionally, there were shops of various artisans, such as tailors, cobblers, merchants, and blacksmiths, to meet certain needs of travelers. To protect the goods and animals stored in the caravanserai, armed guards stood around it at night. These groups of guards protecting the caravans from raids by bandits were called caravanserais.¹⁴

Caravanserais had a number of rules that guests had to follow. The goods of the merchants who came to any city were first checked by the tax collector and taxed according to the rules. As traders traveled through a number of places, they could bring infectious diseases with them. Therefore, before entering the city, they had to go to the bathroom near the gate, wash and change their clothes. Only then could they enter the city. On the one hand, these measures facilitated taxation of caravans entering the city, and on the other hand, they prevented the spread of various infectious diseases in the city.¹⁵ Those who stayed in the caravanserai paid a daily or monthly rent, depending on the duration.

Caravans were led by caravan leaders (malik-at-tujjar). They were chosen by the merchants and managed all the affairs of the caravan during its journey. Caravan leaders were familiar with trade routes, managed to eliminate unpleasant situations, resolved conflicts between caravan participants, and arranged payment of various expenses. Special servants-sergeants reported on the movement of the caravan, for which they received a certain fee.

¹⁰ Valikhanli, p. 122.

¹¹ Miller, p. 125.

¹² Heydarov, p. 24-25.

¹³ Heydarov, p. 125-140.

¹⁴ Onullahi, p. 56.

¹⁵ History of Azerbaijan, p. 68.

Caravanserais played the role of an important trade center, serving as fairs for wholesale commerce. Here, merchants could rent a warehouse, shop, or cell for a short or long terms. During the Middle Ages, caravanserais also served as venues for negotiations between merchants, where important trade deals were reached, and where contracts and agreements were concluded.

Some travelers in Azerbaijan, including those in Nakhchivan, wrote their impressions of the famous caravansaraks in the region. Most of the travelers indicated that the caravanserais were built within a day's distance from each other. Thus, every caravan that set off at sunrise had to reach the next caravanserai by sunset, before dark.

Caravanserais were often patronized by local magistrates, who themselves built caravanserais and rented them out and made a large profit from them. Some caravanserais were dedicated to mosques and pirs. The income received from this type of caravanserais went entirely to the clergy. Sometimes, in cities with good trade and developed trade and craft centers, merchants who came regularly from one or another country built caravanserais with their own funds. These caravanserais were named after the places where those merchants came from.¹⁶

Sources testify that during the Middle Ages in a number of cities of Azerbaijan, including Tabriz, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Ardabil, Shamakhi, Zanjan, Ordubad, etc. large caravanserais were built. For example, the Arab historian Ibn Havgal, who lived in the 10th century, noted that there were many caravanserais along the trade routes in Azerbaijan and Arran.¹⁷ Architecturally, these caravanserais were generally divided into two types: hall-type and inner courtyard. They were also categorized into two groups based on their location:

City caravanserais;

Caravanserai located at the junction of trade routes.

City caravanserais itself were divided into two groups: guest houses where merchants and other travelers stayed temporarily; and the second was caravanserais where wholesale operations were carried out within the city. In large cities, these two types of caravanserais were combined, and merchants had the opportunity to live alongside their warehouses and shops. Medieval sources confirm that major trade operations in caravanserais were conducted under the leadership of caravanserais and the work done was recorded in a special "king's book". At that time, the caravanserai was responsible for ensuring fair and proper trade practices, the quality of the goods, the accuracy of the weights and measures, and if the goods were given on credit, the payment of the agreed price. Also, the caravan dealer officially guaranteed that the buyer would pay the debt on time. In return for this service, he received 2 phases of the agreement reached.¹⁸ Caravanserais were mostly built with two floors. The first floor usually served as a warehouse and merchants' goods were stored there. A stable for keeping animals was also located on the first floor. The second floor was intended only for the overnight stay of merchants and travelers, generally guests.

In order to solve the water problem in the caravanserai, baths were sometimes used, but more commonly wells, cisterns, and reservoirs were built. It is an ordinary stone reservoir with above and below ground parts built to store drinking water collected from rain or underground sources. Wells were dug obliquely. Water was taken out from Ovdana by means of stairs. Those reservoirs were usually placed in rugged areas where digging wells was difficult or in regions prone to drought. Typologically, ovdans (or reservoirs) were divided into two types:

Pits built to collect underground rock water;

Pits which collect atmospheric water.

Pits were usually made of stone and consisted of two parts - underground and above ground. They were built primarily for conducting and developing foreign, transit, and internal trade. At the same time, caravan routes, caravanserais, and ovdans (reservoirs) replaced maps, compasses, and topographic markers for medieval merchants who tried to go to distant lands or an unfamiliar country and sell their goods in more favorable markets.

The territory of Azerbaijan is rich in world-important ancient and medieval monuments belonging to the Great Silk Road. Some of these architectural monuments that have survived to the present day are valuable sources that allow us to study the development of the region's construction techniques, as well as the culture of Azerbaijani people.

Architectural monuments provide valuable and colorful material about the society that created them, the purpose and organization of construction, the materials used in it, and finally, the artistic design of the monument.¹⁹ The natural-geographical position of Azerbaijan along with destructive wars waged by powerful states and natural disasters throughout the history, have unfortunately led to the destruction or even disappearance of some of those monuments. We obtain information about the existence, grandeur and structure of many ancient and medieval monuments in Azerbaijan primarily through written sources. Rich and interesting facts about magnificent architectural examples built in different regions of Azerbaijan have been reflected in those sources. From this point of view, the information of medieval Arab historians and geographers, as well as travelers who visited country Azerbaijan in later times, are particularly interesting.

¹⁶ Aliyev, p. 136.

¹⁷ Ibn Hawqal, p. 95.

¹⁸ Rahmani, p. 180.

¹⁹ Mammadzadeh, p. 3.

The material and cultural monuments that have survived in the area are the most reliable sources of information about the level of cultural development, especially architectural, in Azerbaijan during the ancient and medieval ages. These monuments are mainly categorized as religious (mosques, khanaghahs, pyres, etc.), memorial (mausoleums, etc.) and civil (caravanserais, bridges, etc.) structures. J.Qiyasi showed that since the XI-XIII centuries, there was significant progress in the construction of civil architectural monuments alongside religious and memorial monuments. The Seljuk sultans and atabays made special efforts in terms of raising the prestige of Islam and erecting religious buildings. At the same time, the Seljuks separated religious and secular authorities, which had a strong impact on socio-economic progress, the development of science and art in the Muslim world, and the flourishing of civil architecture.²⁰

It should be noted that during the Middle Ages, the attention given to civil buildings and landscaping rose to the level of state policy. Khaja Nizamulmulk, the grand vizier of the Seljuk Empire, presented a construction and improvement program to the rulers of the time. He wrote: "The king should be engaged in the improvement of the world, build dams, build bridges over big rivers, improve villages and castles, build new castles, build new cities, build tall buildings, beautiful mansions, on big streets (on caravan routes) should order the creation of caravanserais. In these works, his name will remain forever, and he will always be blessed".²¹

The stabilization of the local independent state in Azerbaijan in the twelfth century created favorable conditions for the development of culture, along with other fields, and the city planning and architecture in Azerbaijan reached its most powerful period. In this period, along with other architectural examples, the bridges built over the rivers crossed by the Great Silk Road in order to facilitate the movement of the caravans have a special place.

Bridges, which amazed medieval historians and travelers and a large part of which have survived to this day, have a special place in the architectural history of Azerbaijan. It should be noted that bridges are monuments with high construction techniques. Since the location and construction of bridges was also related to the political, social, economic and geographical requirements of the time, their construction was an important issue.

The location of Azerbaijan in a geographically favorable area, at the intersection of the trade routes passing through Asia and Europe, or rather, its location in a region that connected with Iran, India, one of the oldest countries in the world, and in general with Eastern and Western countries, has been able to bring this country to the position of world trade.²² For this, magnificent bridges were built to reduce the natural barriers that made domestic and foreign trade relations difficult, and to ensure the smooth passage of caravans on intercontinental trade routes passing through the territory of Azerbaijan. One of the most remarkable and significant examples of these is the famous Khudafarin Bridges. Located at one of the most convenient crossings of the Araz River, where large rocky outcrops widen the riverbed, these bridges connected the northern and southern banks of the river. The Khudafarin Bridges, comprising two distinct structures, are not only outstanding architectural achievements but also striking examples of the advanced engineering skills of medieval Azerbaijani builders.

The eleven-span bridge is about 800 m from the fifteen-span bridge. It is located far to the west. As for the history of this bridge, it can be said that the historical conditions for the construction of the bridge here may be related to the creation of the Achaemenid Empire or the ancient period. However, apparently, when the Arabs arrived in Azerbaijan, the eleven-pass bridge was destroyed. Instead of its restoration, a more favorable and directly connected to the road coming from the south, a bridge with ten spans was built.²³ Historical sources indicate that this bridge was built by Shaddadi ruler Fazl I. In addition to wars and military affairs, Fazl dealt with the country's economic issues, especially trade relations.

The construction of such a bridge over the Araz river was really of great historical importance. There are different opinions in the sources about the importance of building this bridge. It should be noted that at the beginning of the 11th century, there was a conflict between the Ravwadis and the Shaddadis from the feudal states of Azerbaijan, which was sometimes typical of the period of feudalism. There is no doubt that Fazl's movement from Araz to the south was a cause of concern for the Ravwadis. Therefore, Fazl had to take certain measures. It was necessary to build such a bridge over Araz to establish regular communication with the southern side of Araz. In general, there were bridges over the Araz in several places on the territory of Azerbaijan. It is likely that the bridge built by Fazl is the Khudafarin's bridge.²⁴

Since the supports of the bridge arches are raised on natural foundations - rocks, the spans are of different sizes and freely arranged. The arches of the eleven-span bridge, built of baked bricks and river stone, are pointed. The total length of the bridge is about 200 meters, the width is 4.50 m, the greatest height above the river level is 12 m, the largest arch span is 8.70 m, the smallest arch span is 5.80 m [5, p.137].²⁵

²⁰ Qiyasi, p. 85.

²¹ Nizamulmulk, p. 76.

²² Mammadzadeh, p. 74.

²³ Salamzade and Mammadzade, p. 22.

²⁴ Sharifli, p. 201.

²⁵ Qiyasi, (a), p. 137.

Thus, the ruins of the eleven-span bridge probably stood during the construction of the eleven-span bridge. Research has shown that the restoration of the eleven-span bridge was needed only during the Elkhani state, in the 13th century. It is about 130 meters long, 6 meters wide, and 12 meters high above the river level. The 3 central arches of the bridge have survived, while the coastal arches were destroyed in the 30s of the 20th century. Since then, a new name for the bridge has emerged - "Sinikh korpu (Broken Bridge)". The remains of the fifteen-span bridge, which is 750 meters west of the fifteen-span bridge, are covered with large stone slabs built from top to bottom.²⁶ At this time, the passage of Khudafarin became a large geographical point in the territory of Azerbaijan, where not only trade caravans, but also people moved.²⁷ It should also be noted that Khudafarin, being an important point on the Silk Road, borders Ahar from the north, Kalibar district from the south to the east, and Verzigan from the west. The territory is mountainous and plain. The weather is quite hot in summer and mild in winter. Bridges of Khudafarin are outstanding architectural works, examples of high engineering skills of medieval Azerbaijani builders. Although these bridges have survived in a destroyed state, it can be seen from the remaining parts that it was built very magnificently and was of great importance.

CONCLUSION

The study of trade relations in the context of the Great Silk Road reveals the profound cultural significance of economic interaction across regions. Far beyond mere commercial exchange, the Silk Road served as a powerful mechanism for the transmission of knowledge, ideas, artistic styles, and social practices. The case of Azerbaijan—situated at the crossroads of East and West—demonstrates how trade facilitated not only material prosperity but also intellectual and cultural flourishing during the medieval period.

Architectural monuments, literary works, and historical records examined in this research underscore the multidimensional role of trade in shaping the identity and legacy of Azerbaijani civilization. The contribution of Azerbaijani thinkers, craftsmen, and architects to broader cultural developments across the Islamic world and beyond highlights the integrative function of caravan routes in historical processes of globalization.

Ultimately, this research confirms that the cultural heritage of Azerbaijan cannot be fully understood without considering its place within international trade networks. The results also emphasize the need for further interdisciplinary study of trade as a formative factor in the evolution of societies, especially in regions like the Caucasus, where cultural intersections were historically dense and enduring.

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²⁶ Qiyasi, (a), p. 137.

²⁷ Salamzade, and Mammadzade, p. 23.