

Trade relations between the Safavid State and England in the 16th century (based on the account of Anthony Jenkinson's second expedition)

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Abstract.

The purpose of this article is to examine the establishment and early development of Safavid-English trade relations during the sixteenth century based on Anthony Jenkinson's second expedition to the Safavid state in 1561–1563. Particular attention is devoted to the political, economic, and diplomatic significance of this mission, as well as to the strategic role of Safavid Azerbaijan and the Volga–Caspian trade route in the expansion of Anglo-Safavid relations. **The research methodology** is based on comparative-historical analysis, synthesis, and critical examination of primary written sources. The study mainly relies on Anthony Jenkinson's travelogue, the collections published by Richard Hakluyt, and other documentary materials related to the activities of the Muscovy Company. In addition, modern historiographical studies concerning Safavid-European relations were comparatively analyzed in order to ensure a balanced and objective interpretation of the problem. **The scientific novelty** of the article lies in the comprehensive analysis of Safavid-English trade relations within the broader geopolitical context of sixteenth-century Eurasia. Unlike earlier studies that focused only on separate aspects of the issue, this research evaluates the political, commercial, and diplomatic dimensions of Jenkinson's mission together. The study also critically reassesses several historiographical interpretations related to Ottoman influence, the role of intermediary merchants, and the chronology of Jenkinson's negotiations at the Safavid court. **Conclusions.** The findings demonstrate that Jenkinson's expedition represented the first systematic attempt by England to establish direct commercial and diplomatic relations with the Safavid state through the Volga–Caspian route. The privileged decree granted to English merchants in Shirvan in 1563 became the first official legal framework regulating Anglo-Safavid trade relations and contributed to the continuation of economic and diplomatic contacts between the two states throughout the later sixteenth century.

Keywords: Safavid state, Anthony Jenkinson, Shah Tahmasp I, Volga–Caspian route, Anglo-Safavid relations, Safavid Azerbaijan.

Торговельні відносини між державою Сефевідів та Англією у 16 столітті (на основі даних другої подорожі Ентоні Дженкінсона)

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Анотація.

Метою цієї статті є дослідження становлення та раннього розвитку сафавідсько-англійських торговельних відносин у XVI столітті на основі другої експедиції Ентоні Дженкінсона до держави Сефевідів у 1561–1563 роках. Особливу увагу приділено політичному, економічному та дипломатичному значенню цієї місії, а також стратегічній ролі Сефевідського Азербайджану та Волго-Каспійського торговельного шляху у розширенні англо-сефевідських відносин. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на порівняльно-історичному аналізі, синтезі та критичному вивченні первинних письмових джерел. Основу дослідження становлять щоденник Ентоні Дженкінсона, збірки, опубліковані Річардом Хаклюйтом, а також інші документальні матеріали, пов'язані з діяльністю «Московської компанії». Крім того, для забезпечення збалансованого й об'єктивного тлумачення проблеми було здійснено порівняльний аналіз сучасних історіографічних праць, присвячених сафавідсько-європейським відносинам. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає у комплексному аналізі сафавідсько-англійських торговельних відносин у ширшому геополітичному контексті Євразії XVI століття. На відміну від попередніх досліджень, які розглядали лише окремі аспекти проблеми, ця праця поєднує політичний, торговельний і дипломатичний виміри місії Дженкінсона. Дослідження також критично переосмислює низку історіографічних інтерпретацій, пов'язаних з османським впливом, роллю посередницьких купецьких груп та хронологією переговорів Дженкінсона при дворі Сефевідів. **Висновки.** Результати дослідження свідчать, що експедиція Дженкінсона стала першою систематичною спробою Англії встановити прямі торговельні та дипломатичні відносини з державою Сефевідів через Волго-Каспійський маршрут. Привілейований указ, наданий англійським купцям у Ширвані у 1563 році, став першою офіційною правовою основою англо-сефевідських торговельних відносин і сприяв продовженню економічних та дипломатичних контактів між двома державами упродовж другої половини XVI століття.

Ключові слова: держава Сефевідів, Ентоні Дженкінсон, шах Тахмасп I, Волго-Каспійський шлях, англо-сефевідські відносини, Сефевідський Азербайджан.

The problem statement. Historically, Azerbaijan, which constituted one of the principal political and economic centers of the Safavid state in the early sixteenth century, played a significant role in both the internal economic structure and the foreign trade relations of the Safavid Empire. Owing to its strategic geographical position at the intersection of major Eurasian trade routes, Safavid Azerbaijan gradually became an important intermediary region linking the Caucasus, Iran, Central Asia, Anatolia, and Eastern Europe. Consequently, the region occupied a key place in the commercial and diplomatic processes that reshaped Eurasian relations during the early modern period.

The transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century represented a turning point in world history. The era of the Great Geographical Discoveries fundamentally transformed international trade networks, altered the economic balance between states, and accelerated the expansion of maritime commerce and colonial ambitions, particularly among Western European powers (Mahmudov, 2012, p. 13). These developments not only redirected global economic flows toward newly discovered

maritime routes, but also intensified political and commercial competition for access to Eastern markets, raw materials, and strategic transit corridors. In this context, commercial expansion increasingly became one of the principal driving forces of European foreign policy.

The geopolitical and economic transformations associated with the Great Geographical Discoveries inevitably affected the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus. During the second half of the sixteenth century, the Safavid state and its integral component, historical Azerbaijan, were gradually incorporated into the expanding system of international economic relations. At the same time, Western European maritime states sought alternative routes to the East in order to bypass the dominance of traditional Mediterranean and Ottoman-controlled trade networks. England, which entered overseas commercial competition later than Spain and Portugal, displayed particular interest in establishing direct economic relations with the Safavid East through the Volga–Caspian route.

Under such circumstances, the Safavid state emerged as an important geopolitical and commercial partner for England. The growing English interest in the Caspian basin and Safavid markets reflected broader transformations in sixteenth-century Eurasian trade and diplomacy. Therefore, the study of Safavid-English relations should be evaluated not only within the framework of bilateral commercial contacts, but also in the broader context of early modern geopolitical competition and the restructuring of global trade systems.

Analysis of Sources and Recent Research. The study of Safavid-English relations in the sixteenth century is based primarily on travel accounts, diplomatic correspondence, commercial reports, and documentary materials produced by representatives of the English “Moscow Company.” Among these sources, the diary of Anthony Jenkinson occupies a particularly important place. As one of the leading agents of the company, Jenkinson travelled several times to Muscovy, Central Asia, and the Safavid state between 1557 and 1571. His second expedition to the Safavid state in 1561–1563 contains valuable information about the political atmosphere of the Safavid court, regional trade routes, the commercial significance of Azerbaijani cities, and the broader geopolitical situation in the Near East. Since these observations were recorded by a direct participant in the events, they possess exceptional historical value for the reconstruction of early Anglo-Safavid relations.

The reports of other English travelers and merchants connected with the “Moscow Company,” including Richard Chancellor, Arthur Edwards, Laurence Chapman, Lionel Pluntree, Jeffrey Duckett, and Christopher Burrough, also provide important information concerning England’s eastern trade policy and its growing interest in the Safavid state. These materials clearly demonstrate that English commercial policy gradually moved beyond Muscovy toward more direct engagement with the Caspian region and the markets of Safavid Azerbaijan. At the same time, they reflect England’s broader attempt to gain access to Eastern trade routes outside Ottoman and Portuguese control.

Most of these travel accounts and commercial reports were collected and published at the end of the sixteenth century by the English geographer and writer Richard Hakluyt in his well-known compilation *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (Hakluyt, 1599). Hakluyt’s collection remains one of the principal documentary sources for the study of England’s early overseas expansion. Its importance is connected not only with the preservation of valuable historical materials, but also with Hakluyt’s close association with political circles during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Owing to this position, he had access to official correspondence and commercial records related to English foreign policy and overseas trade.

Later editions of Hakluyt’s collection published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries significantly increased the academic value of these materials. Particularly important are the editions prepared by E.D. Morgan and C.H. Coote in 1886 and the Glasgow edition of 1903 (Early voyages, 1886, I–II; The principal, 1903, II–III). These publications introduced critical annotations, textual corrections, and comparative revisions that made the documentary materials more accessible for historical analysis. In the present research, the 1599, 1886, and 1903 editions were comparatively examined together with the Russian translation published in 1937 in order to ensure a more accurate interpretation of the sources.

An important aspect of the present study is the comparative use of different versions of Jenkinson’s diary. Such comparison allows clarification of several chronological and interpretative issues that have remained controversial in earlier scholarship. It also helps identify certain inaccuracies that emerged in later historiographical interpretations. The use of multiple editions and translations therefore strengthens the reliability of the research and provides a more balanced understanding of the historical events connected with Jenkinson’s mission to the Safavid court.

The historiography of Safavid-English relations began to develop more systematically in Azerbaijani scholarship during the middle of the twentieth century. One of the first scholars to examine the issue in a separate and comprehensive manner was Adham Shahmaliyev, who approached England’s eastern commercial activity within the broader framework of European trade expansion in

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the Near East (Shakhmaliev, 1958). His studies laid the foundation for later Azerbaijani research devoted to Safavid-European relations.

The works of Bakhtiyar Ahmadov further expanded the study of the problem by focusing on the activities of English merchants in Safavid territories and the commercial policy of England toward the Safavid state (Akhmadov, 1967a; Akhmadov, 1967b). Ahmadov's research remains important for understanding the economic dimension of Anglo-Safavid relations and the role of the "Moscow Company" in the development of English trade in the East.

A major contribution to the historiography of the issue was also made by Yagub Mahmudov, whose works examined both the diplomatic and economic aspects of Safavid relations with European states (Mahmudov, 1977; Mahmudov, 1980; Mahmudov, 1985). Mahmudov paid particular attention to the geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan within East–West trade relations and emphasized the strategic role of the Volga–Caspian route in the development of Safavid-European contacts.

In more recent years, the problem has continued to attract scholarly attention in the works of D. Hasanzadeh, D. Azimli, T. Najafli, A. Bakhshaliyev, M. Agalarov, and other researchers who examined various political, diplomatic, and economic aspects of Safavid-European relations (Hasanzade, 2007; Azimli, 2014; Najafli, 2020). Nevertheless, despite the existence of valuable studies, the issue has not yet been investigated comprehensively within the wider context of sixteenth-century Eurasian geopolitical and commercial transformation. Most previous studies focused mainly on individual diplomatic episodes or commercial questions, while broader comparative analysis of political, economic, and historiographical dimensions remained relatively limited.

For this reason, the present study attempts to approach the problem through a broader analytical framework by combining comparative examination of primary documentary materials with critical analysis of modern historiography. Such an approach makes it possible to evaluate Anthony Jenkinson's mission not only as an isolated commercial expedition, but also as part of the larger transformation of Eurasian trade and diplomacy during the early modern period.

The purpose of this study is to examine the establishment of Safavid-English trade relations in the sixteenth century based on Anthony Jenkinson's second expedition to the Safavid state in 1561–1563. The research aims to analyze the political, economic, and diplomatic significance of this mission and to evaluate the role of the Volga–Caspian trade route and Safavid Azerbaijan in the development of early Anglo-Safavid relations. Particular attention is devoted to the activities of the Muscovy Company and the commercial importance of Azerbaijani cities such as Shamakhi within regional and international trade networks. The study also seeks to reassess existing historiographical interpretations through a comparative analysis of primary written sources and modern scholarly literature.

The results and discussion of the research. The results of the present research demonstrate that the establishment of Safavid-English trade relations during the sixteenth century was closely connected with the major geopolitical and economic transformations that emerged after the Great Geographical Discoveries. During this period, the redistribution of world trade routes significantly altered the balance of power between European states and accelerated the search for alternative commercial corridors connecting Europe with the East (Mahmudov, 2012, p. 13). England, which remained outside the main Mediterranean and Atlantic trade systems dominated respectively by Italian merchants, Spain, and Portugal, was forced to seek new directions for economic expansion (Mahmudov, 1980, p. 9). Under such circumstances, the Volga–Caspian route gradually became one of the most promising alternatives for English commercial policy in the East.

The study reveals that the formation of the "Moscow Company" in 1555 represented an important turning point in England's eastern policy. The company was established not merely as a commercial institution, but also as an instrument for expanding English geopolitical influence in Eurasia (Mahmudov, 1980, p. 93). The expeditions organized by the company during the second half of the sixteenth century demonstrate that England's interest increasingly shifted from Muscovy toward the Safavid state and the Caspian basin. In this regard, the journeys of Anthony Jenkinson became especially significant because they provided English political and commercial circles with valuable information concerning regional trade routes, diplomatic conditions, and the economic structure of the Safavid territories (Hakluyt, 1599, p. 344).

The findings further indicate that England's first attempts to establish profitable trade relations with Central Asia did not produce the expected results. Jenkinson's descriptions of Bukhara, Urgench, and neighboring commercial centers portray markets with relatively limited trade circulation and weak commercial dynamism (English travelers, 1937, pp. 176–177). In his observations regarding Bukhara, Jenkinson openly admitted that there was "no hope of profitable trade" in the region (The principal, 1903, II, p. 472). Such assessments significantly influenced the subsequent orientation of English trade policy toward the Safavid state. Compared with Central Asia, Safavid Azerbaijan possessed more active urban markets, broader international trade relations, and stronger commercial traditions connected with the Caucasus, Iran, Anatolia, and neighboring regions.

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An important result of the research concerns the commercial role of Azerbaijani cities within the Safavid economic system. The evidence derived from Jenkinson's diary demonstrates that English textile products had already reached Safavid markets through intermediary commercial networks before direct diplomatic relations were formally established between the two states (The principal, 1903, II, p. 478). Jenkinson's unsuccessful attempt to sell English cloth to merchants from Shamakhi indicates that local traders were already familiar with such imported goods and could obtain them at comparable prices within Safavid territories. This finding suggests that indirect commercial interaction between England and the Safavid state had existed earlier, while the expedition of 1561–1563 transformed these indirect contacts into official diplomatic and economic relations.

The research additionally highlights the strategic significance of Shirvan in the development of Anglo-Safavid trade relations. Jenkinson's reception by Shirvan Beylerbeyi Abdulla Khan Ustajli demonstrates the interest of regional Safavid authorities in strengthening foreign trade relations with European merchants (English travelers, 1937, p. 203). The detailed descriptions of diplomatic ceremonies, hospitality, and negotiations provided in Jenkinson's diary illustrate not only the political culture of the Safavid administration but also the economic priorities of the regional elite. Shirvan occupied a highly important geographical position along the Volga–Caspian route and served as one of the principal gateways connecting Northern Eurasia with the Safavid interior. Consequently, the favorable treatment of English merchants reflected broader regional interests in expanding alternative trade channels during a period of Ottoman-Safavid rivalry.

The study also demonstrates that Safavid-English relations during this period were shaped not only by economic considerations but also by broader geopolitical concerns. During the negotiations with Anthony Jenkinson, Safavid officials showed considerable interest in the political and military situation of Europe, particularly in the relative strength of England, Muscovy, the Habsburg Empire, and the Ottoman state (English travelers, 1937, p. 133). Such discussions indicate that the Safavid political elite viewed England not simply as a commercial partner but also as a possible geopolitical actor capable of influencing the balance of power in the Near and Middle East. Therefore, the diplomatic contacts established during Jenkinson's mission should be understood within the wider context of sixteenth-century Eurasian geopolitics.

Particular attention should be given to the diplomatic strategy of Shah Tahmasib I during the negotiations with English merchants in Qazvin. At first glance, the Shah's relatively cold reception toward Jenkinson may appear to reflect unwillingness to cooperate with Christian powers. However, a closer analysis of the political context demonstrates that this behavior was largely conditioned by ongoing Safavid-Ottoman negotiations following the Peace of Amasya (Mahmudov, 1985, p. 112). Jenkinson himself notes that the Ottoman ambassador had arrived at the Safavid court shortly before his audience with the Shah (English travelers, 1937, p. 207). Under such conditions, Tahmasib I sought to avoid provoking Ottoman suspicions by openly supporting English merchants. Consequently, the Shah's cautious attitude reflected diplomatic pragmatism rather than outright hostility toward England.

The findings additionally reveal that Ottoman political and commercial circles strongly opposed the establishment of direct Anglo-Safavid trade relations. Ottoman merchants feared losing their intermediary position in regional trade networks if English merchants gained direct access to Safavid markets through the Volga–Caspian route (Early voyages, 1886, I, p. 144). Jenkinson's diary explicitly states that Turkish merchants attempted to influence the Ottoman ambassador and persuade the Safavid Shah not to favor the English delegation (The principal, 1903, III, p. 27). Nevertheless, despite these pressures, the Safavid administration continued negotiations with English merchants and eventually granted them commercial privileges. This situation demonstrates that economic interests frequently outweighed political tensions in Safavid foreign policy.

The research also contributes to the historiography of Safavid-European relations by critically reassessing certain interpretations found in Western scholarship. Ronald Ferrier argued that the failure of negotiations between Jenkinson and Shah Tahmasib I was caused mainly by the influence of Ottoman officials and Armenian merchants (Ferrier, 1986, p. 50). However, comparative analysis of primary source materials used in the present study does not support such a conclusion. The available versions of Jenkinson's diary do not mention Armenian merchants as decisive actors during the negotiations in Qazvin (The principal, 1903, III, p. 29). Although Armenian merchants certainly occupied an important place within Safavid trade networks, the sources indicate that Ottoman commercial interests represented the primary obstacle to Anglo-Safavid rapprochement. Therefore, some later historiographical interpretations appear to exaggerate the political role of Armenian merchants beyond what is directly supported by sixteenth-century evidence.

Another important result of the research concerns the chronology of Jenkinson's mission. Comparative examination of different editions of the primary sources confirms that Jenkinson's audience with Shah Tahmasib I took place on November 20, 1562, rather than in 1561, as mistakenly indicated in some secondary studies (Hakluyt, 1599, p. 348; English travelers, 1937, p. 200). This

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chronological clarification is significant because it helps establish a more accurate sequence of diplomatic events surrounding the English mission to the Safavid court. The analysis also demonstrates the importance of comparing multiple editions and translations of primary historical documents in order to avoid the repetition of mechanical historiographical errors.

One of the central findings of the study is the analysis of the privileged trade decree granted to English merchants in Shirvan in 1563. According to this decree, English merchants received freedom of movement, commercial security, customs exemptions, and the right to engage in direct trade within the territory of Shirvan (English travelers, 1937, p. 215). Although the decree formally applied only to the Shirvan Beylerbeylik, it nevertheless represented the first official legal basis regulating direct Anglo-Safavid commercial relations. For England, these privileges opened access to Safavid markets through the Volga–Caspian route. For the Safavid administration, cooperation with English merchants created an alternative economic direction during a period when Portuguese influence in the Persian Gulf limited southern maritime trade routes.

The research further demonstrates that Anthony Jenkinson's expedition had long-term consequences for the future development of Safavid-English relations. Following the events of 1561–1563, the Safavid state became one of the principal eastern directions of English commercial expansion. The subsequent expeditions organized by the “Moscow Company” during the later decades of the sixteenth century confirm that the initial mission achieved its strategic objectives (Abramyan, 1956, p. 43). Thus, the first direct contacts established during Jenkinson's journey laid the foundation for the continuation of political, economic, and diplomatic relations between England and the Safavid state.

From a broader historical perspective, the findings of the present research demonstrate that the first Anglo-Safavid contacts formed part of the larger transformation of Eurasian trade and diplomacy during the early modern period. The increasing involvement of Western European powers in Eastern markets, the expansion of northern trade corridors, and the growing integration of the Caspian basin into international commerce significantly changed the economic geography of Eurasia during the sixteenth century (Magidovich, 1983, p. 214). Within this process, Safavid Azerbaijan occupied a strategically important position as both a political center and a commercial crossroads linking Europe, the Caucasus, Iran, and Central Asia.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that Anthony Jenkinson's second journey to the Safavid state should not be viewed merely as an isolated merchant expedition. Rather, it represented an important stage in the evolution of early modern Eurasian political and economic relations. The mission reflected England's expanding commercial ambitions, the pragmatic foreign policy of the Safavid administration, and the growing interconnectedness of European and Asian markets during the sixteenth century. Consequently, the establishment of Anglo-Safavid trade relations through the Volga–Caspian corridor contributed significantly to the integration of Safavid Azerbaijan into wider international commercial networks and laid the foundation for future diplomatic and economic cooperation between the two states.

Conclusion. The present study demonstrates that Anthony Jenkinson's expedition to the Safavid state during 1561–1563 represented a significant turning point in the history of early modern Eurasian trade and diplomacy. Although the mission initially had an exploratory and commercial character, its outcomes extended far beyond the immediate objectives of the “Moscow Company.” Jenkinson's journey became the first systematic attempt by England to establish direct political and economic relations with the Safavid state through the Volga–Caspian route, thereby opening a new stage in Anglo-Safavid relations.

The research confirms that the emergence of these relations was closely connected with the broader geopolitical and economic transformations of the sixteenth century. The reconfiguration of global trade routes following the Great Geographical Discoveries, together with the dominance of Spain and Portugal over maritime commerce, encouraged England to search for alternative eastern corridors. Under such circumstances, the Caspian basin and Safavid Azerbaijan acquired strategic importance within England's expanding commercial policy. The study further reveals that Safavid Azerbaijan, particularly Shirvan and Shamakhi, occupied a key position within regional and international trade networks linking Northern Eurasia, the Caucasus, Iran, and the Near East.

The findings also demonstrate that Jenkinson's expedition contributed to the transformation of indirect commercial contacts into formal diplomatic and economic relations. The privileged decree granted to English merchants in Shirvan in 1563 became the first official legal framework regulating Anglo-Safavid trade relations. This decree provided English merchants with important commercial privileges, including freedom of movement, customs exemptions, and trade security. At the same time, it offered the Safavid administration an alternative economic direction during a period when southern maritime routes were constrained by Portuguese influence in the Persian Gulf and by regional geopolitical tensions.

Another important conclusion of the study is that Safavid-English relations during this period cannot be interpreted solely within a commercial framework. The negotiations between English merchants and Safavid officials reflected broader geopolitical considerations connected with Ottoman-Safavid rivalry, Muscovite expansion, and the changing balance of power in Eurasia. Shah Tahmasp I's cautious diplomatic behavior toward the English delegation illustrates the pragmatic foreign policy pursued by the Safavid administration in order to preserve regional stability while simultaneously exploring new economic opportunities.

The research additionally highlights the importance of critically reassessing historiographical interpretations through comparative analysis of primary written sources. Examination of different editions of Jenkinson's diary and related documentary materials allows for clarification of several chronological and interpretative issues that have remained controversial in previous scholarship. In this respect, the study contributes not only to the history of Safavid-English relations but also to the broader historiography of early modern diplomatic and commercial interaction between Europe and the East.

In conclusion, Anthony Jenkinson's second expedition should be regarded not merely as an isolated merchant enterprise, but as an important component of the wider transformation of sixteenth-century Eurasian political and economic relations. The mission laid the foundation for long-term Safavid-English cooperation, strengthened England's commercial interests in the East, and contributed to the integration of Safavid Azerbaijan into emerging international trade networks of the early modern world.

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