

**SCTMG 2020****International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the  
Context of Modern Globalism»****GILAN GOSTINY DVOR IN ASTRAKHAN AS A TRADING POST  
OF PERSIAN-AZERBAIJANI MERCHANTS**

Pirova Rena Nizamievna (a)\*, Ozdamirova Eliza Musatovna (b), Rajabova Zarifa Kabilovna (s),  
Shikhalieva Ulyana Kubutaevna (d)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Dagestan State Medical University, 1, Lenina ave., Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan, Russia,  
pirova69@mail.ru

(b) Chechen State University, 32, A. Sheripova str., Chechen Republic, Grozny, Russia, eliza1976@mail.ru

(c) Dagestan State Medical University, pl. Lenin, 1, Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan, Russia, kafarov.56@mail.ru

(d) Dagestan State Medical University, pl. Lenin, 1, Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan, Russia,  
enigma365@mail.ru

***Abstract***

The city of Astrakhan has become the center of Russian-Asian trade since its founding in 1558. Due to geographical conditions, the main counterparty to this trade is Persia, its provinces and territories, both on the western and eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea. Persian merchants in Astrakhan established their trading posts – caravanserais in the early 17th century. The trading post was established for the good trading conditions, with the encouragement of the Russian authorities co-financed by the Russian Treasury. This trading post was further named Gostiny Dvor. Living yards were based on the ethnic features. So, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the city had Russian, Armenian, Indian, Bukhara, and Persian courtyards. Due to the ethnic differences, immigrants from the Northern and Transcaucasian provinces of Persia (ethnic Azerbaijanis) established their own Gilan Gostiny Dvor in Astrakhan. Gilan guesthouse has become a significant trading factor in the implementation of trade relations between Russia and the eastern countries and territories adjacent to the Caspian Sea, primarily Iran. The colony during the Petrine time and in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries flourished, its members engaged into the wholesale trade of goods between the two countries. The company was able to form its own parish and build a parish mosque, first a wooden, and in 1817–1819 – it was made of stone. The study analyses the processes of social, economic, ethnic evolution of the population of the Gilan guest house, as a trading post of the Azerbaijani-Persian merchants within 18–19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

**Keywords:** Gilan Gostiny Dvor, Persians, Azerbaijanis, trading post, Russian-Iranian foreign trade.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

The city of Astrakhan was founded in the middle of the sixteenth century and from the very beginning it became not only a military-strategic point, but also the main trading gateway of Russia to the East. According to the chronicles, when Astrakhan was being built in 1558, many Central Asian and Persian merchants arrived to visit the first Astrakhan governor, Ivan Chermisinov with an initiative to start Russian-Asian trade.

Ivan the Terrible's policy regarding eastern merchants in Astrakhan was the construction of guest houses financed by the Russian Treasury: Gilan guest house for the Persian ("Kyzylbashi," as they were called in Russia) and Bukhara for the Central Asian ("Tezik"). Foreign merchants had to pay fee for the right to trade and the money used to go to the treasury (Gusarova, 2009).

As the name implies, the Gilan trading yard was founded by immigrants from the northern provinces of Iran and the Transcaucasia, eventually forming a fairly closed corporation of merchants. A distinctive feature of this group was its ethnic composition. Despite the fact that the members of the corporation were called Persians or Persians in official correspondence and in business customs, they were ethnically Azerbaijani. In the future, this circumstance (Turkic ethnic and linguistic community) will predetermine the entry of the Gilan trading yard into the Tatars urban society of the Three Yards – Bukhara, Gilan and Agryzhansky (where the Turkic-speaking population of Asian origin will be united by the ethnonym Tatars), and then (already in the post-reform period) in community of Astrakhan urban Tatars (Imasheva, 2015).

For centuries, the Gilan Gostiny Dvor in Astrakhan has been assigned the role of a trading post of the Persian-Azerbaijani merchants in the Lower Volga region. The Gilan Gostiny Dvor made a great contribution to the development of trade along the Volga-Caspian route. Subsequently, at the beginning of the 19th century, its Persian component was transformed into the Astrakhan Persian merchant society, headed by the Persian foreman (elder), which in Persia was called 'Vekil'. There were also ethnic Azerbaijanis in this community, but ethnic Persians, who stubbornly did not want to accept the citizenship of the Russian Empire, always had a great impact.

Also, some of the Persian merchants entered the Astrakhan Armenian Gostiny Dvor. This was due to the trade and estate privileges that the Russian authorities granted the Armenians in Astrakhan. The Persian merchants were in a great competition in the 17–18, but also they collaborated with the Armenian merchants in foreign trade along the Volga-Caspian route. Further they took an initiative to join this trade corporation to increase their profits. Thus, the Gilan Gostiny Dvor largely performed the functions of an international trading post in the region.

## 2. Problem Statement

For approval on the Volga-Caspian route, after the liquidation of the independence of the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates in the middle of the 16th century, the Russian government needed to form effective institutions for trade and economic cooperation with neighbouring eastern countries and territories. As such, almost immediately after the founding of Russian Astrakhan, Gostiny Dvor Yards were founded. The Russian authorities gave permission and supported financially trading posts of

merchants from Persia and Central Asia, further they were based in the city. It should be noted that such tactics – attracting Muslim merchants from these regions to trade intermediary activities with eastern countries and territories, were successfully implemented by the Mongols and the rulers of the Golden Horde (Zaitsev, 2004).

For several centuries, until the end of the 18th century, Russian Astrakhan was the country's main trading gateway to the East. Eastern markets were the most important (if not the only) profitable place for Russian industry products. Back then in the West, Russia had no competitive economical system. Asian markets were set for raw materials, especially for manufacturing and leather production.

Due to certain established trade traditions in Islamic countries, including Persia and the Central Asian khanates, Muslim merchants gained lots of significant benefits. The taxation on trade duties for Christian merchants amounted 20–25 % of the goods' value, while Muslim merchants were taxed at a minimum of 2–4 %. Another significant factor was the familiarity with the languages and customs of the eastern countries (Rozhkova, 1963).

Thus, only the eastern merchants were considered the main agent of Russian-Asian trade. Patronizing the development of this trade, the Russian government favored the trading factors of the eastern merchants in Russian cities. One of such factories was the Gilan Gostiny Dvor in Astrakhan. Of course, it has become one of the components of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure of the city. Mosques, residential and trading houses, the building of the caravanserai complemented the architectural appearance of the city.

Due to the ethnogeographic features of Persia of that period, despite the common name of all subjects of the Persian Shah 'Persians', in fact, ethnically, the residents of the Gilan Gostiny Dvor were mainly ethnic Azerbaijanis, who came from both South Azerbaijan and Transcaucasia. Therefore, subsequently, when the Russian government reoriented its Asian trade to the Black Sea and launched an attack on the class-citizenship privileges of the merchants of the Gilan court, they became part of the urban Turkic-Muslim community with Russian citizenship.

### **3. Research Questions**

The aim of the study was to solve three interrelated tasks. First, this is the definition of the goals and methods of Russian economic policy in relation to the Persian-Azerbaijani merchants in 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which founded a trading post in Astrakhan – Gilan Gostiny Dvor. Secondly, to identify the historical factors that contributed to the formation and development of a special ethno-confessional social group in the space of the Russian city. And the third task is to analyze the real measures of the Russian government regarding the population of the Gilan guest house in Astrakhan.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the article is to analyze the goals and actions of the central and regional authorities of Russia in relation to the Persian-Azerbaijani merchants, who founded their trading post – Gilan Guest House in Astrakhan. And also find out how the change in economic preferences of Russia changed the economic and social status of the Persian-Azerbaijani merchants in the late XVIII – early XIX centuries.

## 5. Research Methods

The study is based on the methodology of systematic approach in combination with the principle of historicism. The general scientific systematic approach involves the use of socio-historical, general scientific and interdisciplinary methods: problem-chronological, comparative-historical, retrospective, etc. The methods are used for the transmission and analysis of historical material. The principle of historicism applied in the study article considerate forms and methods of managing the local and central authorities of Russia and the Astrakhan province. The study methodology is focused on the Astrakhan Gilan Gostiny Dvor along its specific historical facts.

The study of the activities of the Persian-Azerbaijani merchants and their role in the socio-economic space of the Russian city, historical reasons and factors form the problem of estate-subordinate relations of this group. Russia had a specific policy towards Asian merchants.

The research questions are based on the systematic approach to the problem and a systematic analysis of the material. To illuminate the understanding of Russia's economic interests in Asian countries, the study analyses the problems of interaction between Russian trading and Persian trading elites. To obtain representative information from published and unpublished sources, system-structural and problem-historical methods.

## 6. Findings

The date of the Gilan Gostiny Dvor is still unknown. A plan of the city was drawn up during the reconstruction of the city of Astrakhan in 1673. It indicates a fairly vast area of the Gilan Dvor which lasts for more than a dozen years (Golikova, 1982). Thus, the study suggests the date of 17th century when Gilan Gostiny Dvor was founded.

According to Shtylko (the author of the Klyucharyov Chronicle and authoritative connoisseur of astrakhan antiquity of the 19th century) trading farmsteads (including Gilan) were kept at the expense of foreigners. So, by the middle of the century building of all the shopping malls, shops of the courtyard of the caravanserais, as well as mosques at them were financially supported by Asian merchants (as cited in Zaitsev, 2004).

The question of the exact dating of the foundation of the courtyard seemed impossible at the beginning of the 19th century, when the population of the Gilan Dvor already became a part of the Three Courtyards society (which united the Bukhara, Gilan and Agryzhansky) and the society was given a name 'the Tatars'. Further, the authorities tried to study their citizenship and estate status.

The Astrakhan governor requested an information from the Astrakhan police chief in September 1808. The police chief gave a vague response, stating that the police have no information, and it must be in the provincial archive. But there was no information in the archive. It is interesting that the inhabitants of the courtyards themselves, including the elders of the courtyards who questioned the most "oldest and worthiest", could not even name the approximate time when the courtyards appeared in Astrakhan. The governor requested information several times, but he found no solid answer about when and how residents of the courtyards arrived to settle down in Astrakhan.

The legislative registration of the population status in Bukhara, Gilan and Agryzhansky Tatar yards of the city of Astrakhan and its economic and economic activities was an important information during 18-19th centuries. Separately, there was the problem of class registration of the population inhabiting the yards. According to Peter's law, being Russian citizens, the inhabitants of the yards enjoyed the rights of their self-government, submitting to the Asian Mohammedan court specially created in Astrakhan and paying small fees to the Treasury.

Their main activity during this period was trade and barter with the Middle and Middle Eastern states (Bukhara, Khiva, Persia, Turkmen and Kazakh countrysides) Russian goods, as well as Asian shops in Astrakhan itself.

According to the Astrakhan Provincial Government the population of the yards was small in 1797. Back then the trade was also not that developed. In favor of the state, all three yards annually, since 1746, used to pay the tax fee of 500 rubles (Zemstvo duties). The tax was made up of the following amounts: 150 rubles for commercial fishing, in excess of the tax paid on imported and tempering goods; 300 rubles – to help the Russian merchants, for the maintenance of military barracks, and 50 rubles for other military needs – 50 rubles.

The provincial reform was carried out in 1785, it obliged the urban population to enroll in the bourgeois or merchant rank. In 1786, Caucasian Governorate was created, and, in the same year, guided by the provisions of the City Regulation, Governor-General Count G.A. Potemkin, forced the society of the three yards to enroll in the Russian merchants and philistines (Iskhakov, 1992).

Most residents of the Gilan court preferred to enlist in the middle class leading to an increase of taxes. The population of the trading station itself fell under the jurisdiction of the City Magistrate. Then, at the turn of the 1780-90s, for a number of objective reasons, foreign trade operations fell into the hands of the Persian merchants, not included in the lists of the court and had more extensive capital for their implementation. These circumstances forced the residents of the Gilan yard to search for job to make living. Further they were hired as workers and clerks from Astrakhan fishermen and merchants. The income of the residents of the Gilan Dvor fell significantly. Taxes, by contrast, have grown. Residents assigned to the court were unable to cope with the new duties, and by the beginning of 1799 the arrears from the entire Trekhdyorovy Society amounted to 6304, 24 rubles.

Changing social status and depriving a privileged merchant rank leads to a gradual reduction in the population of the trading post. At the beginning of 1802, according to the Astrakhan provincial government, there were 350 male residents among the Tatars of the three courtyards. In 1824, there were only 147 residents both male and female in the Gilan Dvor.

The difficult financial situation forced the society of the three courtyards to equip an attorney, a certain Abdul Abishev, to St. Petersburg in early 1797, who submitted to Pavel I and the Senate a petition ‘on the accumulation of the arrears and the exclusion of the Tatars of the three courtyards from the Russian middle class and merchants’, and leaving them on the same position until 1786, in view of their “extreme impoverishment”. Paul I, who purposefully uprooted the “Catherine's” heritage responded to the request. On July 16, 1797, the Senate decided to leave the residents of the three courtyards in philistinism, and add the arrears from them.

In 1800, the Astrakhan Tatar government was formed as an institution of class self-government of the Tatars of the three courtyards of the Astrakhan province. It served as a judicial institution for the analysis of economic and commercial affairs, including, on the basis of the Senate decree of November 9, 1804, it issued passports to Tatars registered in the yards for various commercial and economic operations. The judge from the Gilan court was considered a judge of the second category, that is, according to the degree of influence on the community, he was in second place, after the judge from the Bukhara Gostiny Dvor.

The creation of the council and the transfer of the listed functions to it was a consequence of a certain attitude of the authorities towards an incomprehensible, foreign-language and non-Orthodox diaspora: "... some trade, as usual, of Asians, meets with each other displeasure, but even the very analysis of their trading affairs in the image their lives have a completely different position against Russian and European merchants", and strongly "demand the creation of a special and special body". The government existed until 1879, when its functions were transferred to the magistrates.

In the first decade of the XIX century. residents of three courtyards are in serious confrontation with local authorities. This was caused by an attempt to include the Muslim population of the city in the national estate system and streamline the tax collection system, in connection with the adoption of the Manifesto on January 1, 1807, containing the provisions of the new guild reform.

On its basis, on November 20, 1807, the Decree of the Astrakhan civil governor was issued to the Astrakhan Tatar council on "forcing" residents of the Bukhara, Gilyansk and Agryzhansky yards to a note in the trade guilds. In case of failure to comply with this requirement, the council was instructed not to issue passports "for bargaining" to residents of the three courtyards without reporting to the provincial government. And this was a blow to economic interests.

The Provincial Board pursued, first of all, the goals of increasing tax revenues. Referring to article 10 of the Manifesto of January 1, 1807, local authorities obliged to register in the guild of trading eastern residents of Astrakhan with the rights of foreigners: "... a foreign guest or a visitor who is foreign to the rights of the guild does not sell anything at retail, in his house, or in apartment or in the Gostiny Dvor, and doesn't open for that either a shop or a store, or a similar institution".

By this time, it was not clear either to the Russian authorities or to the residents themselves assigned to the three Astrakhan guest houses, which social category they nevertheless belonged to. Moreover, it was not clear whether they belonged to Russian subjects at all. The local authorities decided that the Asian traders ranked in the courtyards (and above all, those assigned to the Gilan Gostiny Dvor) are still foreigners and extended the above rule to them.

As for the economic and economic activity of the Persian-Azerbaijani population of the Gilan court, an analysis of the documents deposited in the State Archives of the Astrakhan Region shows that during the period under review there has been a gradual curtailment of the commercial and entrepreneurial activity of the population of the court.

By the 1780s, according to the head of the court, "the merchant's condition was destroyed by various unfortunate adventures, such as: repeatedly their caravans traveling to Bukhara were looted by Kyrgyz kaisaks on the way; their trading shops, with goods, in 1766, during the great fire that was in Astrakhan, burned to the ground; in 1770, Kalmyks who fled to Tibet took away a considerable amount of

their capital; "They also subjected them to misfortune many times, which were in Astrakhan, and caused great floods, ruining houses by flooding and destroying their various property without return." By these misfortunes, "those inhabitants were brought into extreme poverty, and, having lost all measures to restore foreign trade, which was their root foundation".

In 1786–1799, when he was "in a note" in Russian philistinism and merchants, the residents of the Gilyansky Yard began to seek various ways of "finding their own food", and "having no ability to bargain for other tricks, they tried in the city petty, according to at least of various things, I'm selling, supporting my upset condition".

At the beginning of the XIX century. the inhabitants of the Gilan court had no capital "needed for the merchant's guild estate". However, capital in the 20-50 thousand rubles was not in the previous decades, "during the free operation of the local commerce." By the 1810s trade turnover was completely "brought to a complete decline", and no one was "bargaining either abroad or inside Russia". And in the city itself, the industrial enterprises of the "society" played practically no role, and they no longer had any influence on the trade of the Russian merchants.

## 7. Conclusion

By the middle of the century, the number of residents assigned to the Gilan Gostiny Dvor decreased to 56 male residents (moving to another area, migration to other regions of Russia, returning to the homeland, for example, to Gilan, etc.).

The compilers of the revision tales confidently refer to the inhabitants of the Gilan court as Tatars, indicating separately the category of Astrakhan Persians. Thus, the loss of a socio-economic privileged status in the space of a Russian city led not only to a loss of this status, but also to a change in ethno-identity.

The study suggests the fact that since the late 1830s the Gilan Gostiny Dvor residents were not in favor of the commercial life of the city. In the second half of the century, the population of the court began to be considered part of the Tatar population of Astrakhan; they were assimilated by the Yurt Tatars. As a result, their prosperity and participation in trade affairs plummeted.

In 1856, 1 family out of 12 families engaged in trade and owned a large wooden house, the rest were mostly engaged for the labor work, as clerks, tenants of the shops of large Persian merchants who were in the Astrakhan guild merchants. In 1876, the Tatar government was closed, and the population of three courtyards was rewritten to the Astrakhan bourgeoisie. The former glory of skillful and resourceful merchants has sunk into oblivion.

## References

- Golikova, N. B. (1982). *Essays on the history of Russian cities of the late XVII – early XVIII centuries*. MSU Publ. House.
- Gusarova, E. V. (2009). *Astrakhan finds: history, architecture, urban planning of Astrakhan XVI–XVIII centuries*. According to documents from the collections of St. Petersburg. Publ. House Nestor-Istoriya.
- Imasheva, M. M. (2015). *Muslim entrepreneurship of the Astrakhan province in the late XVIII – early XX centuries: economic and social aspects of development*. Publ. R. Sorokina.

Iskhakov, D. M. (1992). *Astrakhan Tatars: Ethnic Composition, Resettlement, and Population Estimation in the XVIII – N. XX centuries Astrakhan Tatars*. IDL KSC RAS.

Rozhkova, M. K. (1963). *Economic relations of Russia with Central Asia: 40–60s. XIX century*. Publ. House of the Acad. of Sci. of the USSR.

Zaitsev, I. V. (2004). *Astrakhan Khanate*. Science.