

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2706-6185/49/74-78>

**Farhad Atakishiyev**

Institute of Oriental Studies named after Academician Ziya Bunyadov of ANAS

PhD student

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2952-0386>

atakishiyevfarhad@gmail.com

## The Roots of Economic Ties Between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan

### Abstract

This article explores the historical roots and development of economic ties between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, tracing their evolution from ancient times through the era of the Great Silk Road. It examines how both countries situated at the crossroads of major trade routes, played crucial roles as transit hubs for commerce and cultural exchange between East and West. Drawing on archaeological evidence and historical records, the study highlights the significance of caravan routes, urban trade centres, and political entities such as the Shirvanshah State and the Turkic Khaganates in shaping bilateral economic relations. Special attention is given to the role of the Caspian Sea, caravanserais, and trade goods such as silk, ceramics, textiles and livestock, which facilitated sustained economic interaction. The findings confirm that Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were connected by longstanding commercial traditions and shared geopolitical interests, which laid the foundation for their current economic cooperation. The research underscores the importance of historical trade networks in understanding contemporary regional integration efforts across Eurasia.

**Keywords:** *Silk Road, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, trade routes, commercial traditions, economic cooperation, historical trade networks*

**Fərhad Atakışiyev**

Akademik Ziya Bünyadov adına Şərqsünaslıq İnstitutu

doktorant

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2952-0386>

atanashiyevfarhad@gmail.com

## Azərbaycan və Qazaxıstan arasında iqtisadi əlaqələrin kökləri

### Xülasə

Bu məqalə Azərbaycan və Qazaxıstan arasında iqtisadi əlaqələrin tarixi köklərini və inkişafını araşdırır, onların qədim dövrlərdən başlayaraq Böyük İpək Yolu dövrünə qədərki təkamülünü izləyir. Hər iki ölkənin əsas ticarət yollarının kəsişməsində yerləşməsi, onları Şərqlə Qərb arasında ticarət və mədəni mübadilə üçün vacib tranzit mərkəzlərinə çevirmişdir. Arxeoloji sübutlara və tarixi mənbələrə əsaslanan bu tədqiqat, karvan yollarının, şəhər ticarət mərkəzlərinin və Şirvanşahlar dövləti ilə Türk xaqanlığı kimi siyasi qurumların ikitərəfli iqtisadi münasibətlərin formalaşmasındakı əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır. Xəzər dənizinin, karvansarayların və ipək, keramika, parça, malqara kimi ticarət mallarının davamlı iqtisadi əlaqələrin qurulmasındakı rolu xüsusi diqqət mərkəzindədir. Tədqiqat nəticələri göstərir ki, Azərbaycan və Qazaxıstan uzunmüddətli ticarət ənənələri və ortaq geosiyasi maraqlarla bir-birinə bağlı olmuşdur və bu, onların cari iqtisadi əməkdaşlığı üçün möhkəm zəmin yaratmışdır. Araşdırma, müasir Avrasiya inteqrasiya səylərini anlamaq üçün tarixi ticarət şəbəkələrinin əhəmiyyətini ön plana çıxarır.

**Açar sözlər:** *İpək Yolu, Azərbaycan, Qazaxıstan, ticarət yolları, ticarət ənənələri, iqtisadi əməkdaşlıq, tarixi ticarət şəbəkələri*

## Introduction

The economic ties between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan date back to ancient times and were formed within the framework of the historical Silk Road. Throughout their history, both countries have held strategic positions and played a significant role as key transit hubs for trade and cultural exchange. Trade relations between the two regions developed through the Caspian Sea, contributing to the expansion of economic cooperation between the East and the West.

Archaeological research clearly demonstrates the influence of various cultures and the presence of multicultural values in the richness of our material culture. The people living in this region have consistently established cultural, political, military, and economic relations with different countries, civilizations, and nomadic peoples. These interactions have left distinct marks on both our tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Starting from the first quarter of the 1st millennium BC, Azerbaijan entered a stage of development characterized by the rise of its economic life, political relations, and spiritual culture. From this period onward, certain changes in material culture can be observed, particularly the emergence of new forms in ceramic production. The similarities between Late Bronze and Early Iron Age ceramic samples from Azerbaijan and those found in Georgia, Armenia, Dagestan, Iran, and the Near East, as well as some sites in Central Asia, clearly indicate these mutual interactions (Pogrebova, 1977, pp. 85-113).

### Research

The similarity between the ornaments and depictions found on Khojaly-Gadabay ceramics and those on pottery samples discovered at archaeological sites in Iran, Georgia, Armenia, Central Asia, the Far East, Southern Siberia, and the mountainous Altai region clearly demonstrates the existence of mutual interactions and cultural exchanges among different peoples and civilizations (Guseynova, 2011, p. 94).

One of the most significant stages in the development of economic relations in Azerbaijan's history corresponds to the period during which the Great Silk Road was active. The Great Silk Road was known in ancient and medieval times as a caravan route stretching from China to the countries of Central and Western Asia. This historic trade route passed through countries such as Japan, India, China, Mongolia, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and others. Spanning from the 1st millennium BC to the middle of the 2nd millennium AD, the Silk Road formed a network of routes connecting Europe and Asia.

A major segment of the route began in the Chinese city of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an). As early as the 4th century, when Alexander the Great advanced into Central Asia and crossed the Indus River, Chinese silk had already reached the Mediterranean. The Silk Road served not only as a trade route but also as a vital channel for the transmission of scientific and technological innovations. Important developments such as gunpowder, the magnetic compass, the printing press, musical instruments, silk, porcelain, and painted goods were disseminated from East to West through this route.

For Azerbaijan, this historic corridor was invaluable, not only in terms of economic development but also for cultural and technological exchange.

Between the 2nd and 12th centuries, various Turkic-speaking tribes inhabited the vast territories of Central Asia located along the Silk Road (Valikhanli, 1998). During this period, the Turks supplied China with high-quality horses, weapons, gold, silver, precious jewellery, leather, wool, cotton, fruits, and vegetables through the caravan routes of Central Asia (Huseynov, 2017).

There are several scholarly considerations regarding both the benefits the Turkic Khaganate gained from the Silk Road and how this trade route ultimately contributed to its decline:

1. The wealth obtained through the Silk Road led to a decline in the warrior spirit of both common Turkish community members and the *tarkhans* (military nobles).
2. Among the aristocracy, there was ongoing and intense rivalry for control over trade routes and regional centres along the Silk Road.
3. Governors and *tarkhans* in Silk Road cities gradually stopped obeying the Khagan's army and, in unison, rebelled against central authority.

As a result, in 744, the Eastern Turkic Khaganate fell under the rule of the Uyghurs (Starr, 2013).

The Great Silk Road was not merely a trade route, but a complex network that passed through a series of fortresses and military structures. These fortresses served as resting and protection points for caravans, offering safety from bandits and raiders. Travelers and merchants were well-guarded in citadels and strongholds along the route.

Caravanserais—mud-brick inns built near wells, rivers, and canals—provided essential shelter for travellers. They were designed as secure rest stops where merchants could replenish their water supplies and spend time safely under the protection of military garrisons.

These fortresses were capable of withstanding heavy sieges, ensuring the safety of both merchants and their goods. Caravanserais were not just places of rest; they were also vital centres of trade. Merchants could engage in wholesale transactions, exchange rare and exotic goods, and, most importantly, obtain the latest commercial information—especially updates on market prices (Bekmagambetova, 2003).

The longest segment of the Silk Road—the Steppe Route—passed through the territories of Central Asia and Kazakhstan and remained active until the 14th century. This route experienced its peak development during the 8th to 12th centuries, coinciding with the rise of the powerful Turkic Khaganate.

One branch of the Steppe Route extended from the shores of the Black Sea to the Don River, then to the Southern Ural region inhabited by the Sarmatians, continued to the Irtysh River, and from there reached the Altai region. It further stretched to the land of the Argippaeans, who were settled around the Upper Irtysh and Lake Zaysan (Kazakhstan – turistichekaya Mekka, n.d.).

Caravanserais located along the Silk Road routes within the territory of Kazakhstan have only recently begun to be studied. In the Semirechye region, researchers are investigating the routes of the Silk Road, uncovering and analyzing the remains of caravanserais.

One such site is the Shingeldy Caravanserai, located on the Tian Shan segment of the Great Silk Road. It is mentioned in the memoirs of Guillaume de Rubruck, the envoy of French King Louis IX. The ruins of this caravanserai are situated approximately 100 kilometers from modern-day Almaty, in the center of the Shingeldy settlement (Abishova, 2016).

Taking all the above into account, it becomes clear that economic and trade relations between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan existed both before and after the formation of the Silk Road.

The traditions of trade that began in ancient times continued into the medieval period.

Located along the caravan route, the city of Yasy (modern-day Turkistan) played an active role as a commercial centre for Central Asia and southern Kazakhstan during the 13th to 15th centuries.

Key goods traded included silk, textiles, various types of livestock, examples of applied arts, ceramics, metal products, jewellery, and other items (Smagulov, Grigor'yev, & Itenov, 1998, p. 27).

Among the various routes and branches of the Great Silk Road, the large caravan cities of Otrar-Farab and Shavgar, located along the Syr Darya River, held special importance. Caravan roads initially starting from Shavgar and later from Yasy extended through the Turlan Valley to the northern foothills of the Karatau Mountains and ran in parallel directions along both the northern and southern sides of the Karatau range, following the banks of the Syr Darya (Sultangaliyeva, 2016).

In the medieval period, one of the most powerful states in Azerbaijan was the Shirvanshahs State. The cities of Shirvan specialized in the production and sale of specific goods, indicating that a large number of artisans were concentrated in these urban centers. Wide areas outside the cities were designated for markets. Merchants from the Caspian region, Russia, Iran, Byzantium, India, China, Iraq, and Syria came to the cities of Shirvan. In exchange for the goods they brought, they took with them products such as oil, salt, fish, livestock (particularly mules), saffron, red dye, madder root, and other items transported by caravans.

Craft products held an important place among the exported goods. These included silk fabrics woven in Shamakhi and its surroundings, woolen textiles produced in Baku, Khursan, and Mughan, carpets and carpet items, as well as ceramic and copperware produced in Beylagan and Shabran.

Large cities such as Barda, Derbent, Ganja, Shamakhi, and Baku were located on international trade routes, making them vital hubs of economic and cultural exchange during the era of the Silk Road.

Archaeological excavations carried out in the area of the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and Icherisheher (Inner City) have revealed traces of densely populated neighborhoods belonging to the medieval city. These findings confirm the existence of Baku from the 8th to 11th centuries and beyond. The city extended over a wide area, reaching all the way to the sea.

Excavations around the Palace of the Shirvanshahs uncovered remains of residential buildings, tandirs (clay ovens), water wells, grain pits, refuse pits, numerous fragments of glazed pottery, coins, and other examples of material culture (Bartold, 1924, p. 369). These discoveries demonstrate that Baku held a significant place in the economic and cultural life of the medieval period.

At the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century, international trade between Iran and Azerbaijan with the Far East and other countries expanded significantly. The Old Bukhara Caravanserai, located within the Old Fortress of Baku (Icherisheher) and dating back to the 14th century, confirms that Baku maintained trade relations with the cities of Central Asia (Adzhaib ad-dunya, 1954, p. 200).

### Conclusion

The historical review of trade and economic ties between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan demonstrates that the foundations of their relationship were laid deep in antiquity and continued to evolve through various historical periods. Long before the formal emergence of the Silk Road, both regions were already part of extensive exchange networks, shaped by shared geography, cultural interactions, and strategic trade routes.

The role of powerful states like the Shirvanshahs in Azerbaijan and the Turkic Khaganates in Central Asia underscores the political will to maintain and protect these economic networks. These empires facilitated trade not only through strategic infrastructure such as caravanserais and fortresses but also by promoting safe passage and encouraging artisanal production and urban economic specialization.

In summary, the economic ties between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are rooted in centuries of interaction shaped by the Silk Road and its legacy. These ties extended far beyond commerce—encompassing cultural exchange, technological diffusion, and mutual political influence. Today, as both nations seek to revive and expand transcontinental connectivity through modern initiatives like the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, the historical foundation of their relationship offers a powerful blueprint for future cooperation and integration across Eurasia.

### References

1. Abisheva, Z. R. (2016). Drevniye i srednevekovyye torgovyye puti na territorii Semirech'ya. *Altay-Rossiya: cherez veka v budushcheye*, 189–192.
2. Adzhaib ad-dunya. (1954). *Uch. zap. In-ta vostokovedeniya*, 9, 200.
3. Bartol'd, V. V. (1924). *Mesto Prikaspiyskikh oblastey v istorii musul'manskogo mira: (Kurs lektsiy...)*. Obshchestvo obsledovaniya i izucheniya Azerbaydzhana.
4. Bekmagambetova, G. (2003). Shelkovyy put' v sisteme yevroaziatskikh transportnykh koridorov. *Tranzitnaya ekonomika*, (1), 47–56.
5. Guseynova, M. (2011). *Iz istorii Yuzhnogo Kavkaza: Khodzhaly-Gedabekskaya kul'tura Azerbaydzhana (XVI–IX vv. do n.e.)*. Bizim Kitab.
6. Huseynov, R. (2017). Azerbaijan–Kazakhstan relations: Current situation and prospects. *Przełąd Politologiczny*, (3), 139–160.
7. Kazakhstan – turistichestskaya Mekka. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.igm.kz>
8. Pogrebova, M. N. (1977). *Iran i Zakavkaz'ye v rannem zheleznom veke*. Nauka.
9. Smagulov, Ye. A., Grigor'yev, F. P., & Itenov, A. O. (1998). *Srednevekovaya arkheologiya goroda Turkestana*. Miras.

10. Starr, S. F. (2013). *Lost enlightenment: Central Asia's golden age from the Arab conquest to Tamerlane*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
11. Sultangaliyeva, A. K. (2016). *Kazakhstan and its neighbors: Opportunities and limitations*. Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP).
12. Valikhanli, N. (1998). The Great Silk Road and Medieval Empires. *Silk Road*, (4), 97–101.

Received: 14.03.2025

Accepted: 17.06.2025