

Trade Routes and Economic Relations in The “Zafarnoma”: A Comparative Historical Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines how trade relations, international economic connections, the restoration of the Great Silk Road, and the security of caravan routes are represented in the “Zafarnama” chronicles written by Nizam al-Din Shami and Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi. The economic information contained in the sources is analyzed through comparative methodology, allowing the identification of similarities and differences in the authors’ interpretations. The study expands the source base on the economic policies of the Timurid state, its trade infrastructure, and international relations.

Keywords: Amir Temur, Timurids, trade relations, Zafarnama, Nizam al-Din Shami, Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, Great Silk Road, economic policy, caravan routes, source studies.

1. Introduction

Amir Timur's state (1336–1405) reached the highest level of political and economic development in Central Asia and its neighbouring regions during the 14th–15th centuries. During this period, trade relations, caravan routes, urban and market infrastructure, and international relations were an integral part of economic life. The economic activities of the Timurid era were directly linked to trade, especially to the restoration and security of caravan routes passing through the Great Silk Road [1]. The “Zafarnoma” written by Nizomiddin Shomiy and Sharafuddin Ali Yazdiy are considered the most important sources for studying the economic life of the Timurid period. While Shomiy's work is factual, impartial, and concise, Yazdiy's work is enriched with artistic and ideological interpretation. With the help of these two sources, it is possible to systematically analyse the trade system, caravan routes, and international relations of the Timurid era.

Among the sources on the history of the Timurid period, the Zafarnamas occupy a special place. In particular, the works entitled Zafarnama written by Nizomiddin Shomiy and Sharafiddin Ali Yazdiy are important primary sources that illuminate the political, military, and partly economic aspects of the activities of Amir Temur [2]. Although these works are mainly devoted to the history of military campaigns, they also provide valuable information on trade

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routes, caravan movements, customs duties and tribute systems, as well as the economic significance of cities.

The Zafarnama of Nizomiddin Shomiy stands out because it was recorded by a contemporary author. In his account, economic issues are mostly mentioned in connection with military campaigns, particularly in the context of the strategic and commercial importance of conquered territories. Sharafiddin Ali Yazdiy, on the other hand, presents events in a more literary and ideological manner. In his narrative, economic relations are more often portrayed as a means of justifying and demonstrating state power [3].

The economic life and trade relations of the Timurid period have also been widely studied in later historiography. In Uzbek historical scholarship, researchers such as Bo'ribov Ahmedov and Turg'un Fayziyev have analyzed the socio-political and economic life of Amir Timur and the Timurids. In their works, particular attention is given to the revival of the Silk Road, the expansion of international trade relations, and the development of cities as economic centers.

2. Research Method

This paper endeavors to examine the depiction of trade routes and economic exchanges in the "Zafarnoma" texts of Nizam al Din Shami and Sharaf al Din Ali Yazdi from a comparative historical perspective [4]. This research depends, principally, on a qualitative source analysis process, extracting information of an economic nature that is embedded in the historical narrative. Utilising a structured comparative method, this article examines both primary sources, identifying convergences/differences in the portrayal of trade networks, caravan routes, customs regulations and foreign economic relations. Through comparing the narrative styles used by the authors, it seeks to explain how Shami depicts the unfolding events: full of factuality and succinctness, and how Yazdi, conversely, uses an interpretative strategy to enrich his account ideologically.

The historicity and objectivity, voiced herein by virtue of source coherence, are included by entering the sources into their distinct historical and political-judicial coordinates, namely the economic policies and geopolitical strategies of the Timurid state. A methodical approach is used to classify main topics like caravanserai building, caravan route security and diplomatic trade relations, which enables a nuanced reconstruction of the economies at play during the era. As part of it, very local historical geographic analysis is also utilized to track the distribution of trade routes and their proximity to major settlements.

Incorporation of these approaches yields a more holistic and egalitarian interpretation of the sources, one not only chronicling how trade and economic relations were imagined and practiced in the Timurid period but also shedding light on the impact of authorial perspective on historical description.

3. Results and Discussion

The era of Amir Timur (1336–1405) marked the highest stage of political, military, and economic development in Central Asia and the surrounding regions. In particular, trade, caravan routes, and international economic relations played an important role in ensuring the stability of the Timurid state. Nizomiddin Shomiy (late 14th century – early 15th century) was commissioned by Amir Timur himself to write the "Zafarnama." Shomiy's work is famous for narrating Timur's life, campaigns, and state policies in chronological order [5][6].

Shomiy's approach is factual, objective, and concise, and it also includes trade issues. In this article, a comprehensive analysis is conducted on how the trade routes and caravan movement, customs and tax policies, urban infrastructure and caravanserais, and international trade relations are highlighted in Shomiy's "Zafarnama." In the "Zafarnama," Shomiy particularly notes that trade routes and caravan movement held an important place during the Timurid period. According to Shomiy, in the early years of the Timurid state, the caravan routes passing through the Dasht-i Qipchaq, Mawarannahr, and Khwarezm were organized. Along these routes, the safety of caravans was ensured by military guards; strict measures were taken against looting and crime, and the roads and caravanserais operated regularly. This process ensured the stability of trade and the economic potential of the country. Shomiy notes the orderly movement of caravans and their connection to cities and markets [7].

According to him, tariff rates for merchants were regulated, unnecessary taxes and excessive fees were abolished, and the safety of trade routes and economic stability were aligned with tax policy. This policy encouraged the activities of caravans, revitalized the economic life of cities, and contributed to the development of international trade. According to Shomiyn's statements, markets and caravanserais were restored in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Shiraz; roads, bridges, and inns were built, which facilitated the movement of caravans, created favorable conditions for merchants, and stabilized trade activities. His descriptions indicate the advanced economic infrastructure during the Timurid era and the alignment of trade activities with state policy [8].

The author factually describes trade relations with India, China, the Golden Horde, Rome, and Iran. In the work, international trade relations are presented as a means of strengthening economic stability in Timur's policy. Moreover, trade issues are closely linked with political and military processes. Shami's factual account demonstrates the stability of trade activities and economic potential. Shami records with precise facts Timur's policy in the early stages of his rule to ensure the safety of caravan routes, eliminate looting, and protect caravans. Yazdi, on the other hand, interprets this process as a key factor in the development of Timur's empire. This difference is related to the authors' stylistic approaches; Shami focused on facts, while Yazdi idealized them. Shami notes that under Timur, customs duties were regulated and excessive types of taxes were abolished.

Shomiy factually describes the trade relations with South India, China, and the Golden Horde, while Yazdiy enriches them with a geopolitical context. The study shows that although the "Zafarnoma" of Shomiy and Yazdiy cover trade issues differently, the aim and outcome are the same: during the Timurid era, trade routes were restored, caravans were protected, and international economic relations were strengthened [9].

The "Zafarnoma," written by Sharafuddin Ali Yazdiy in the first quarter of the 15th century, is one of the most accomplished court chronicles on Amir Timur and the history of the Timurids. The work was created at the behest of Shah Rukh Mirzo, whose task was to arrange the life and activities of Timur in a historical [10].

However, aspects such as economic development, caravan routes, trade infrastructure, and international trade diplomacy are also covered in close connection with political events. Yazdi's depictions of trade relations during the Timur period are richer in detail compared to Shami, while the interpretation of events is adapted to the political idea – the concept of 'the stability and justice of the Timurid state.' In the work, trade issues are portrayed, on the one

hand, as a consequence of Timur's military campaigns, and on the other hand, as a practical result of his principles of state governance.

In many chapters of Yazdi's "Zafarnama", he mentions the diplomatic relations conducted by Timur with countries such as China, India, Iran, Dasht-i Kipchak, Rum (Anatolia), Mamluk Egypt, the Golden Horde, and the Persian Gulf states. These diplomatic relations are interpreted as a key factor in restoring and developing trade connections. According to Yazdi, Timur's diplomacy was distinguished not only by military superiority but also by ensuring economic stability. For example, correspondence with the Indian sultans, particularly in dealings with the Delhi Sultanate, mentions the safety of caravan routes, customs duties, and regulations used for trade [11].

Correspondence with the Chinese emperor is interpreted as a political and spiritual symbol aimed at making Timur the center of the Asian trade system. Yazdi evaluates this correspondence as 'a sign of peace and trade spirit between countries.

Through these depictions, the author shows that Timur developed international trade relations based on a strong political platform. In Yazdi's work, 'road safety' is repeatedly emphasized as one of the most important principles of Timur's policy. This directly affected trade relations [12]. The author provides information in several places that Timur had caravanserais built, irrigation networks restored, bridges and road stations established, and guard posts set up in deserts and border areas. For Yazdi, trade was not just an economic practice but also a political indicator demonstrating the power of the state. For this reason, the improvement of roads is presented as a practical embodiment of the state's 'political justice' [13]. Although Timur's policy of justice is depicted in Yazdi in an idealized form, specific measures are shown from the perspective of trade processes: tax reliefs for merchants, guarantees of shelter and protection for caravans, the eradication of ruthless looting in trade activities, and order control in markets and trade centers. Yazdi evaluates these measures as a key factor in the economic stability of Timur's reign [14].

While describing the military campaigns he conducted, he also notes their impact on trade relations. For example: the opening of the roads in Anatolia after the campaign against Rum, the control of caravan routes to Kazakhstan and along the Volga by Timur after the campaign against the Golden Horde, and the free access of Egyptian and Levantine caravans to Central Asia following the Syrian campaign. All of this demonstrates Timur's empire as the main coordinator of the trade system between the East and the West. In Yazdi's work, there are also direct references to the goods being traded: silk and silk fabrics, weapons, gold and silver items, spices, precious stones, livestock products, grains, and food products. Although the work does not provide a precise list of goods, the described economic processes indicate that the trade geography was very extensive [15].

4. Conclusion

In Yazdi's "Zafarnama", trade relations are interpreted as a practical result of Timur's political power, military strength, and concept of justice. For the author, the trade system is a fundamental pillar of Timur's empire, serving as a measure of his diplomatic successes and the effectiveness of state governance. The work shows that the Timur state, through trade relations, became not only an economic but also an international political center. The "Zafarnama" works of Nizam al-Din Shami and Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi are valuable sources for illuminating trade relations during the era of Amir Timur. Shami's work provides straightforward and brief accounts as a direct witness to events, while Yazdi's work offers a

deep, systematic, and economic analysis of trade policy. These two works show the importance of trade relations, caravan routes, customs policy, and international trade diplomacy in the economic rise of Timur's empire.

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