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The Foreign Trade of Tabriz: 1800-1900

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(Received 24 May 2023; revised 22 August 2023; accepted 22 August 2023)

Abstract

Under the early Qajars, Tabriz rose from being a provincial backwater in ruins to the foremost commercial entrepôt of Iran. Initially, its insignificant foreign trade was limited to Turkey (mostly raw Gilani silk), but, when the major commercial southern and western supply routes of Iran became unsafe and costly, trade moved to the northern route. Moreover, after Russia opened its territory to European goods in 1821, these also flowed via Tiflis to Tabriz. When ten years later Russia revoked this permission, the Tiflis trade moved to Tabriz via Trabzon, gradually replacing not only the Tiflis route but also the Istanbul-Erzurum route. This turned Trabzon into a quasi-“Iranian” port, as initially most of its imports were destined for or coming from Iran. Four-fifths of imports to Tabriz were European fabrics. Initially these had come from Russia, but, as of the 1820s, such were replaced by British, German, French, and Swiss fabrics. By mid-century, Manchester fabrics dominated the import trade of Tabriz. Thus, Great Britain took Russia’s place as its primary trading partner, although by 1900 the tables had turned. During the majority of the nineteenth century, Caucasian Armenian merchants dominated Tabriz’s foreign trade, with European merchants playing an important but limited role in the import of Manchester goods and the export of raw silk. After 1870, the importance of Tabriz as the commercial hub of N.W. Iran decreased, due to various reasons such as the outbreak of the Gilan silk disease, Russia stopping the transit of non-Russian goods, and the opening of the Suez Canal, but also because it became cheaper to import goods via Bushehr and Baghdad-Kermanshah. Nevertheless, even with a diminished role as a financial center and less foreign trade, Tabriz continued to be Iran’s major commercial center until WW I.

Keywords: Foreign trade; Tabriz; Qajar; Trabzon; Russia; merchants

Introduction

The volume of Tabriz’s foreign trade was influenced by a number of factors, both external and internal. External factors included countries’ rules and regulations, such as those of the Ottoman Empire and Russia, through which much of Tabriz’s trade passed. Moreover, war, the threat of war, and security in those countries, either because of marauders or military operations, had an impact on trade, sometimes even a positive one for Tabriz; I speak more on this later.¹ Furthermore, whether foreign partners demanded cash, sold on credit, and/or agreed to barter also impacted trade. In 1839, the American consul reported:

Formerly, sales were to Persian merchants in Constantinople for cash, but now, gradually, 6 months credit is allowed. Last summer a caravan was robbed resulting in

¹ See below as well as Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712-1848*, 1801, note 282.

non-payment of the 6 month credit, so that there is now few or no sales for ready money.²

The value of the *qran* and local banking arrangements were also closely related to the issue of payment method.³

Internal factors included the rise and fall in the purchasing power of domestic demand not only in Azerbaijan, but also in other parts of Iran, as Tabriz was but an entrepôt and much of its trade was in transit.⁴ As 80 percent of Azerbaijan's population earned their livelihood in agriculture, their incomes rose and fell in harmony with the harvest. Poverty in Tabriz's hinterland, for whatever reason, was not good for trade, as people could not afford imported goods. This meant that weather conditions or agricultural plagues impacting agricultural production, oppression by landlords and government officials, famine, political developments with the potential to result in upheaval, and road security all had direct consequences on both the urban and rural population's purchasing power, and thus for sales.⁵ Azerbaijani peasants, on the whole, were "in a fairly well-to-do position." Peasants suffered more from "the careless and unequal distribution of the fiscal burden" than from structural oppression by landlords.⁶ However, it would seem that the level and incidence of oppression increased in Azerbaijan.⁷ In the 1880s, the acting governor, Amir Nezam, abolished fiscal payments in kind, meaning payments all had to be in cash, and his successors continued this practice.⁸ In the 1890s, a British traveler observed: "In no other country in the world does poverty, due to the rotten state of the government, exist like in Azerbaijan; the peasants are held in a state of oppression and abject slavery."⁹ The situation in Azerbaijan did not differ much from that in the rest of Iran, although there were local differences.¹⁰

Migration was a positive factor on trade. In the 1850s to 1860s, intra-rural migration began, in particular in the northern provinces of Azerbaijan and later, after 1880, in Khorasan. This was first due to demand for unskilled labor in the Caucasus and the Transcaspian regions, and second, to the fact that the agricultural season was too short to enable many of the landless workers in Azerbaijan to earn enough to feed their families. It was customary for the Nestorian Christians to go to work in Russia and, in this way, they earned some £100,000 per year.¹¹ Many Moslem Azerbaijanis also went to work in Russia, and "immediately [as] the harvest is completed and gathered they return, bringing their hardily-won earnings with them."¹² This annual migration lasted until the Russian

² Government of the United States, "David Porter, US Legation to John Forsyth, Secretary of State. St. Stephano, 25/11/1834 and 06/08/1835," 53.

³ NA, FO 60/483 (October 23, 1886); in general, see Floor, "Bankruptcy in Qajar Iran." See also the discussion between the government and foreign merchants concerning problems with tamassoks. Adib al-Molk, *Dafe' al-Ghorur*, 167, 266–67.

⁴ According to E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Montazam-e Naseri*, vol. 1, 4561, two-thirds of goods imported to Tabriz were forwarded to the interior of Iran. He also produces a list of goods imported to Tabriz around 1880 from Tiflis, Trabzon, and Ardabil. *Ibid.*, 562–63.

⁵ In 1829, there was a peasant uprising against paying the landlord's share. Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 283–84.

⁶ DCR 423, "Report on the Agricultural Resources of the Province of Azerbaijan, District of Tabreez by Abbott," 3–4.

⁷ von Thielmann, *Streifzuege im Kaukasus, in Persien und in der Asiatischen Tuerkei*, 298.

⁸ E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Mer'at al-Boldan*, vol. 2, 1155; Duval, *Les dialects Neo-Arameens de Salamas*, 17.

⁹ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad via Tiflis, Tabriz and Persian Kurdistan*, 105; DCR 1569, "Report on the Trade of the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1894–95 by Cecil G. Wood," 5; see also E'yn al-Saltaneh, *Ruznameh-ye Khaterrat-e E'yn al-Saltaneh*, vol. 2, 1583, 1591 regarding the oppressive behavior of Ali Reza Khan Garrusi.

¹⁰ For details, see Floor, *Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran*.

¹¹ Government of Great Britain, "Report by Consul-General Abbott upon the Condition of the Nestorian Christians of Oroomiah," 36.

¹² Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad via Tiflis, Tabriz and Persian Kurdistan*, 138–39.

Revolution of 1917, after which it declined sharply, stopping completely around 1920.¹³ Finally, market behavior and developments—such as competing products, prices, and routes—all influenced the volume and composition of trade.¹⁴ More on this further on.

The Growth of Foreign Trade

A weak start: 1800–1820.

When, in 1798, the Qajars finally established their rule over the territory of Iran, the population of Tabriz, said to have numbered 500,000 in the 1670s, had dwindled to a mere 40,000. Devastating wars during the Afghan and Afsharid rule (1722–1750), civil war (1795–96), and two major earthquakes, which reduced the city to a heap of ruins, were responsible for this decline. In 1721, the first earthquake ruined about 75 percent of houses and damaged the large main buildings, and about 40,000 people lost their lives.¹⁵ The second earthquake in 1780 destroyed the city: all major buildings damaged by earlier shocks were ruined completely; all private houses, the fort, and the walls were totally destroyed; and some 50,000 people were killed, reducing the population to a mere 40,000 inhabitants. Also, the *qanats* and springs dried up.¹⁶ The city, however, did not receive much room to recover, as the Qajar ruler was not uncontested. In 1795, Sadeq Khan Shaqaqi challenged Fath Ali Shah's rule. Sadeq Khan appointed his brother, Mohammad Ali Soltan, as governor of Tabriz and, "supported by the lower classes, plunderers, profligates, dissolute characters, and bankrupts of the city," he oppressed the people of Tabriz. The latter also forced the artisans and manufacturers of Tabriz and Qarajehdagh to march with his army on Khoy.¹⁷

Despite these events, foreign observers had a rather inflated idea of Tabriz's commercial importance. In 1801, for example, it was reported:

This place carries on a prodigious trade in cotton, cloth, silks, gold and silver brocades, and fine shawls. It is seated in a delightful plain, surrounded by mountains, whence a stream proceeds, which runs through the city.— The King's visit is said to be occasioned by some commercial matters which require regulation.¹⁸

There was trade passing through Tabriz, but there are no details of its nature. According to Pallas, the value of the export of raw silk from Iran to Turkey and Italy in the 1780s to 1790s amounted to 1,000,000 rubles. He argued that trade with Iran (imports: silk, fish, indigo,

¹³ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 50–52; Abdullaev, *Promyshlennost i zarozhdenie rabochego klassa Irana v kontse XIX-nachale XX v.*, 189–95; Hakimian, "Wage Labor and Migration: Persian Workers in Southern Russia, 1880–1914."

¹⁴ Küss, *Handelsratgeber für Persien*, part 3, 27.

¹⁵ See Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 115–17 for contemporary newspaper reports. At that time, the city had neither a fort nor walls, see *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁶ Ambraseys and Melville, *A History of Persian Earthquakes*, 52–55; Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 660, 757–58. Both Freygang, *Letters from the Caucasus and Georgia ... Journey into Persia*, 311 and Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et la Perse*, 155–56 experienced earth shocks during their stay in Tabriz. Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808, 1809*, vol. 2, 238 (40,000 inhabitants, including 50 Armenian families).

¹⁷ Brydges-Jones, *The Dynasty of the Kajars*, 31–32. For a description of the situation of Tabriz during the second half of the eighteenth century and its takeover by Mohammad Aqa Shah, see Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 27–53, 147–61.

¹⁸ The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser; Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 723. Ferrieres-Sauveboeuf, *Memoires historiques, politiques et geographiques des voyages du comte du F-S faits en Turquie, en Perse et en Arabie depuis 1782 jusqu'en 1789*, vol. 2, 3 writes in the same vein, even describing the ruined city as one embellished with beautiful mosques. However, Brookes, *The General Gazetteer or, Compendious Geographical Dictionary*, q.v. Tabriz, wrote that by 1800, due to earthquakes and Turkish attacks, Tabriz had been "reduced to an insignificant place."

cotton, madder, galls plus 100,000 rubles in manufactured goods) was disappointing for Russia (exports: cochineal, sugar), as it ran a structural trade deficit.¹⁹

In 1804, after Qajar rule was reestablished over Tabriz and the province of Azerbaijan, Abbas Mirza was appointed the province governor. Instead of the young fifteen-year-old prince, however, Ja`farqoli Khan Donboli initially governed the city and province. Gradually, Abbas Mirza increased his control and continued the program of city renovation begun by Zand governors and provincial magnates after the 1780 earthquake.²⁰ While most of Abbas Mirza's construction activities were military in nature, as the war with Russia dominated public policy, some also had economic objectives.²¹ Housing was, of course, a private matter; after all, the state's role in the economy was and remained rather limited. According to Porter:

The Prince does not aim so much at adorning the city, as to strengthen it. The present fortifications were begun, and finished by him; and a maidan, or square, laid out, and surrounded with barracks, for the troops he is organizing according to European tactics. A palace also is under the masons' hands, for his own residence.²²

The city was further surrounded by a thick wall, protected by towers, bastions, and a deep moat. Its total circumference was about 6,000 meters. Four gates gave access to the city, whose suburbs were still in ruins; in some parts, the wall extended to over three miles from the city. The had twenty caravanserais.²³ Despite these building activities, however, Morier was not impressed by the city:

Tabriz is no more the magnificent city described by Chardin: all its large buildings have been destroyed by earthquakes. I rode round the walls, and estimated the circumference at three miles. Three of the gates are ornamented with pillars, inlaid with green-lacquered bricks, and look very respectable; the other five are very small and mean. The walls are very weak, and here and there renewed with mud-bricks baked in the sun. The whole town is surrounded by gardens, which the Persians call Meewa-khonéh, or fruit-houses.²⁴

¹⁹ Pallas, *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise in die südlichen Statthalterschaften des Russischen Reichs in den Jahren 1793 und 1794*, vol. 1, 157, 191–98. There also was an increase in the Caspian trade, in particular with Darband, part of which likely transited via Tabriz. On the Caspian trade increase, see Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 661–62, 673. For Russian trade with Iran in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Gmelin, *Travels through Northern Persia 1770–1774*, 315–24; Kukanova, "Osveshenie Russko-Iranskikh Ekonomitseskikh Sviazey XVIII-Natsala XIX v. v Maloizvestnikh Arkhivnikh Dokumentakh."

²⁰ Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 78–80, 155; Ambraseys and Melville, *A History of Persian Earthquakes*, 55 (The restoration of some historical buildings had already begun in 1795).

²¹ See Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 83–85 for a discussion of provincial leaders who constructed new caravanserais and other buildings in the Tabriz bazaar, as well as building activities in the city in general, including qanats. In fact, Ahmad Khan Moqaddam, apart from investing in the construction of bazaar buildings in the 1780s, also issued a decree granting tax exemptions to promote trade. *Ibid.*, 93.

²² Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, etc. during 1817–1820*, vol. 1, 227; see also Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 85–88. Freygang, *Letters from the Caucasus and Georgia ... Journey into Persia*, 318–19 commented on this wall: "so weak and low a wall, that it could not make the smallest resistance to the enemy; the Persians do not therefore consider the place secure from capture by the Russians; and when the latter penetrated into the country as far as the Araxes, Tabriz was abandoned by nearly all its inhabitants."

²³ Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, etc. during 1817–1820*, vol. 1, 221, 223. Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808, 1809*, vol. 2, 233–35 writes that the city had seven gates, which he mentions by name. In 1842, it had eight gates (Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 49). In 1860, the city had nine gates (Amanat, *Cities & Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran 1847–1866*, 218). The city had two walls, which were useless as defensive works. See Johnson, *A Journey from India to England through Persia, Georgia, Russia, Poland and Prussia in the Year 1817*, 211; Amanat, *Cities & Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran 1847–1866*, 217; and Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 69–86.

²⁴ Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor in the Years 1808 and 1809*, 277.

Table 1: Population estimates of Tabriz

Year	Number of inhabitants	Source
1791	20,000 maximum	Nader Mirza 1373, p. 81
1805	50,000	Jaubert 1821, p. 158
1809	40,000	Dupre 1819, vol. 2, p. 238
1809	250,000 or 50,000 houses	Morier 1812, p. 284
1810	30,000	Kinneir 1971, p. 151
1812	100,000	Freygang 1823, p. 283
1813	>50,000	Drouville 1976, p. 222
1826	80,000	Alexander 1827, p. 216
1826	50,000	Belanger 1843, p. 321
1830	60,000	Smith 1833, vol. 1, p. 144
1834	80,000	Perkins 1843, p. 147
1840	60-100,000	Southgate 1840, vol. 2, p. 7
1842	<100,000	Bérézine 2006-11, vol. 2, p. 66.
1843	140,000	Wagner 1856, vol. 3, p. 91
1848	150,000	Gödel 1849, p. 30
1849	>100,000	Sheil 1971, p. 91
1850	100,000	Issawi 1971, p. 27
1850s	200,000	Watson 1976, p. 172
1864	150,000	Amanat 1983, p. 223
1872	100,000	von Thielmann 1875, p. 288
1888	200,000	DCR 423 (1888 Tabreez), p. 2.
1890	170-200,000	Curzon 1892, vol. 1, p. 521; Issawi 1971, p. 27
1895	200,000	Harris 1896, p. 98

Houses were gradually rebuilt, but only one-story high. Also, allegedly, more timber and a construction technique called *takht-e push*, which supposedly withstood shocks better, were used.²⁵

In 1807, Jaubert believed that Tabriz had a population of 50,000 and its circumference some 10,000 meters, almost twice that given by Porter (see Table 1; and note 23). Its walls were high, with towers, and its gates were tiled in multi-variegated colors.²⁶ In 1809, Morier, estimated the population at 50,000 houses and 250,000 people, which is much too high.²⁷

Due to Mohammad Agha's cruel suppression of the opposition, many inhabitants fled the province. When Abbas Mirza became governor of Azerbaijan, he tried to create

²⁵ Freygang, *Letters from the Caucasus and Georgia ... Journey into Persia*, 311 had her doubts about this. As timber was expensive, wood was only used "in some of the best houses." Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 147.

²⁶ Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et la Perse*, 158.

²⁷ Morier, *A Journey through Persia, Armenia and Asia Minor in the Years 1808 and 1809*, 284 (the generally accepted rule of thumb was five persons per house; however, most of the 50,000 houses were destroyed and nobody was living in them). Also, Morier's population figure is completely at odds with all other demographic estimates.

circumstances to induce people to return.²⁸ In the 1820s, for example, Tabriz inhabitants who lost property when a caravan was plundered in Shirvan received the equivalent in property from Abbas Mirza.²⁹ He also financially supported foreign trade.³⁰ But this was not the only sign that trade, like the city's population, was slowly growing. For example, the *sarrafs* of Tabriz had a relationship, presumably financial, with the governor of Khoy, who gave drafts on them for Jaubert.³¹ The latter further opined that, when he passed through Tabriz, the bazaars appeared well-kept and filled with goods from India and Iran.³² However, Klaproth wrote that after the first Iranian-Russian war of 1813, the limited trade that had existed between the two countries was reduced to nothing.³³ Soon after the end of the war, however, Freygang reported: "the silk manufactories [in Tabriz] are numerous, and their fabrics are of a perfect delicacy; indeed a spirit of industry pervades the people so generally, that they drive a busy trade."³⁴ In fact, all European visitors submitted that, because of its size and trade, Tabriz was the kingdom's second city, although some found this hard to believe.

Tabriz is a large town; but at first view one can hardly believe it to be the second in Persia in rank, extent, wealth, manufactures, trade, and population, which, they say, amounts to a 100,000 souls. Were it not for the superb bazaar, and a multitude of churches, one should be included to look upon this vast mass of little dwellings as an immense village.³⁵

It is noteworthy that none of the travelers who visited Tabriz during the first two decades of the nineteenth century (e.g., Gardanne, Jaubert, Morier, Ouseley, Freygang, or Drouville) indicated the volume or composition of Tabriz's trade. In fact, most did not mention its trade at all. Dupré is the only one who provides some information in 1809, even though he exaggerates the city's commercial position and splendor, alleging that Tabriz was one of Iran's most commercial cities. Caravans from Erzerum, Baghdad, Rasht, Tiflis, Hamadan, Shiraz, and Isfahan carried goods there from Europe and India. Tabriz either distributed these goods to other parts of the country or offered them for sale in its well-covered and well-stocked bazaar. Tabriz also exported its own silk and cotton manufactures, as well as other fabrics such as *dara'i*.³⁶ While there is no doubt that Tabriz, like other cities, received caravans from various other cities, this did not necessarily make it a major commercial hub in terms of volume. After all, the province as a whole was still recovering from past devastations, military operations were still ongoing, and Tabriz itself had perhaps only 40,000 inhabitants and was in ruins. Also, Dupré observed that there were only a few, perhaps twenty, wealthy merchants in the whole of Iran, making it less likely that major trade was taking place. In fact, he submits that very little trade was happening between Iran

²⁸ Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et la Perse*, 159.

²⁹ Brydges-Jones, *The Dynasty of the Kajars*, 280.

³⁰ *The Oriental Herald*, 206.

³¹ Jaubert, *Voyage en Arménie et la Perse*, 130.

³² *Ibid.*, 358.

³³ Klaproth, *Tableau historique du Caucase*, 171. Drouville, *Voyage en Perse pendant les années 1812 et 1813*, vol. 1, 39 opined that the end of the war would be good for Iranian trade, in particular with Georgia.

³⁴ Freygang, *Letters from the Caucasus and Georgia ... Journey into Persia*, 319. In 1831, Smith and Dwight opined: "with the exception of a few silk goods wrought from materials raised in Mazandaran, it is the seat of no important manufacture; and even they are all the work of domestic looms." Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 147.

³⁵ Freygang, *Letters from the Caucasus and Georgia ... Journey into Persia*, 316–17.

³⁶ Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808, 1809*, vol. 2, 239–40, 248 (Transport to Baghdad was 30 piasters per load, to Tehran and Hamadan 10 shahis per batman, and to Erzerum and Tiflis from 30 to 100 piasters per 80 okkas, depending on the season). Transport from Bushehr to Tabriz was 8 tumans per 100 batman. Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808, 1809*, vol. 2, 13.

and its neighbors (Russia and the Ottoman Empire).³⁷ Further, in 1817, von Kotzebue was rather dismissive of Tabriz as a trading town:

The bazaar here, which is reckoned the first in Persia, is nothing more than a narrow passage, the top of which is covered with rush mats, and it is lined with small shops. Here and there the passage opens into a spacious court, occupied by caravansarys, which are merely stone warehouses, where merchants deposit goods which they afterwards retail in the shops. ...Very few of these tradesmen have shawls for sale, and when they have any, it is only in small numbers.³⁸

Trade with the Ottoman Empire consisted of the following exports: Kashmir and Kerman shawls, indigo, some Gilan silk, gall nuts, tobacco, Bokhara skins, pipe stems, and drugs. Imports consisted of: some European items and a range of fabrics, such as chintz, light cloth, silken stuffs, velvets, moirés, brocades, braids, sequins, ironmongery, crockery, and porcelain.³⁹

It was only around 1820 that Tabriz was slowly becoming a booming commercial entrepôt.⁴⁰ A French observer of Tabrizi trade in 1825, Eugène Desbassayns de Richemont, reported that, due to the Irano-Ottoman border conflict of 1821, the road to Istanbul was closed and Iranian merchants had thus diverted their trade to Tiflis.⁴¹ In that same year, additionally, the market share of Russian cotton fabrics had become so important that Iranian manufacturers petitioned Fath `Ali Shah (r. 1797–1834) to ban their further import.⁴² When, in 1824, peace was agreed between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman government reduced the customs rate for Iranian traders to four percent and exempted them from transit taxes in Kurdistan and Turkey proper; a move aimed at attracting Iranian merchants to the overland trading route to Istanbul and Izmir. Despite these fiscal incentives, however, trade did not increase. This is clear from the price paid for the customs tax farm, which amounted to 12,000 tumans before the war, but only 10,500 in 1824 and 7,000 in 1825. As a result, Abbas Mirza felt obliged to assume direct control over the Tabriz customs office.⁴³

Tabriz Becomes Iran's Premier Entrepôt

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Tabriz was supplied via Tiflis, Lenkoran, Rasht, Erzerum, Trabzon, Bushehr, and Baghdad. In the 1820s, according to a report from St. Petersburg, some 300 merchants traveled to Constantinople each year to buy European goods. To support this trade, Abbas Mirza invested 20,000 tumans in this endeavor. At Tabriz, ten to twelve caravans arrived annually from Constantinople via Erzerum, importing 400,000 tumans of English and French goods. In return, Iran exported silk, tobacco, shawls, indigo, and pepper. Very little trade came from Smyrna any longer, because goods had to be bought there with ready money. From Trabzon, 200–300 horses carried glassware, pottery,

³⁷ Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808, 1809*, vol. 2, 378, 387–88.

³⁸ Von Kotzebue, *Narrative of a Journey into Persia in the year 1817*, 177–78. Von Kotzebue also remarks that the shawls in the bazaar were not the good ones, as these were all sold to Constantinople because Iranians did not have the means to buy them. Johnson, *A Journey from India to England through Persia, Georgia, Russia, Poland and Prussia in the Year 1817*, 217 had problems hiring pack-animals, which he only obtained via the prince-governor's intervention.

³⁹ Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 431.

⁴⁰ It was also at this time that Abbas Mirza tried to attract Europeans migrants to settle as farmers in Savojbolagh, offering very attractive fiscal and other incentives. See Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 1045–46.

⁴¹ Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 432.

⁴² Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces and the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea*, 368, 378. In 1820, a geographical dictionary mentions that “the inhabitants have a trade in cotton, silk, and cloth.” Brookes, *The General Gazetteer or, Compendious Geographical Dictionary*, q.v. Tabriz.

⁴³ Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 432.

Table 2: Rough estimate of Iran's foreign trade in 1820–21 (in £)⁴⁴

Exports from Persia to India at the port of Bushire, according to official reports	305,000
Export from Barforush, estimated by merchants, including remaining exports from Gilan and Mazandaran	250,000
Exports from smaller Persian Gulf ports and islands	10,000
Trade with Baghdad, including silk	200,000
Trade with the rest of Turkey, including silk	200,000
Trade with Tiflis and Georgia	200,000
Exports to Bokhara and the states to the eastward	50,000
Trade with Arabia	10,000
Total	1,225,000

porcelain, and ordinary cloth to Tabriz annually. Also, via Tehran, goods such as coffee, shawls, indigo, sugar, cover lids, prints, and English cotton fabrics arrived from Bushehr, representing a value of one million tumans in trade to Tehran and Tabriz. Via Baghdad, Tabriz received at least 100,000 tumans in English and French goods.⁴⁵ It is difficult to assess the reliability of the above trade figures, as well as those presented by Fraser below (see Table 2). The latter's figures contradict the above, showing that trade with Turkey was only 200,000 tumans, not 400,000, assuming that one tuman equaled one British pound. Although a rough and inflated estimate, Fraser's data suggests that Tabriz's foreign trade amounted to some £400,000 (Tiflis + rest Turkey) in 1821 already, implying that it was already the most important entrepôt in Iran.⁴⁶ However, other contemporaries argued that Tabriz's commercial importance as an entrepôt only began in 1831.⁴⁷

Before Tabriz's trade gained importance, most imports entered Iran via the Bushehr-Shiraz and Baghdad/Kermanshah routes. However, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, insecurity on these routes increased. The Baghdad-Kermanshah route suffered both border raids and incursions into Iraq by the governor of Kermanshah, as well as the general unruliness in the Baghdad *pashalik*, while raids by the Mamasani tribe made the Bushehr-Shiraz route insecure.⁴⁸ Therefore, trade looked for safer and cheaper routes. As a result, the Turkish route via Erzerum-Khoy-Tabriz and the Tiflis-Tabriz route, promoted by the Russian government after its conquest of that part of the Caucasus, acquired prominence. As of 1812, several British authors and an 1825 French trade mission favored the development of the under-utilized Trabzon-Tabriz route, arguing that this shorter, cheaper route would enable not only the large-scale import of European goods to Tabriz, but also a more cost-effective export of raw Iranian silk and other products.⁴⁹ The main argument favoring Tabriz was "distance." The Bushehr route

⁴⁴ Fraser, *Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia*, 211.

⁴⁵ *The Oriental Herald*, 206. According to E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Montazam-e Naseri*, vol. 1, 561, goods from Trabzon were usually carried on mules, while those coming from Tiflis were mostly carried by camels and sometimes cart. However, according to Wagner, caravans left Erzerum for Tabriz almost weekly. "The smallest of caravans generally consist of from two to three hundred, the largest of nine hundred horses." Wagner 1856, vol. 3, 6.

⁴⁶ There was very little travel between Tiflis and Baku, thus Tiflis trade must have gone to Tabriz. Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780–1828*, 151–52.

⁴⁷ Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 132.

⁴⁸ See Floor, *The Persian Gulf. Links with the Hinterland*, 126–27; Idem, *Kermanshah: City, Society and Trade*, 294–99.

⁴⁹ Issawi, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 18–27; Idem, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 92–103; Stocqueler, *Fifteen Months' Pilgrimage through untrodden tracts of Khuzistan and Persia*, vol. 2, 3–6, 12–13, 16–18 (see his appendix B regarding 1830–31 imports via Trabzon).

was 1,930 km long with transportation costs of 10–13 tumans per load, while the Trabzon route was 965 km long and cost 5–6 tumans per load.⁵⁰

Where others talked and/or wrote, Sadeq Beg, an Armenian agent of Abbas Mirza, at his master's orders, acted, importing British goods directly from Great Britain via Trabzon for the first time in 1827.⁵¹ During his first voyage, he met Charles Burgess in London, whom he convinced to join Abbas Mirza's army as a military advisor. When, in 1829, the British military mission was let go due to financial problems, Charles Burgess established himself as a merchant—financed by his father—working, amongst others, with Sadeq Beg, who had been promoted to the rank of khan, and henceforth named Sa'id Khan. In 1830, Burgess claimed to have been the first European merchant to import goods directly from Europe to Iran. He sailed from England via Istanbul to Trabzon (4–10 days), and from there via Erzerum (10–11 days) to Tabriz (16 days). He paid his 3 percent duties at Istanbul and a small fee at Diyadin (Deodeen), and found the road reasonable and safe. In winter, however, the road was rather dangerous.⁵²

The shift in trade with Iran via Tabriz was further enabled by the transfer of the staple from Izmir to Istanbul around 1820. Thereafter, Iranian merchants were able to buy European goods cheaper in Istanbul, which they first shipped via Scutari overland via Erzerum to Tabriz. This route was quite an improvement for channeling European goods via Turkey.⁵³ Foreign trading interests, however, argued that direct trade between West Europe and Iran, via the Trabzon-Tabriz route, offered better opportunities than indirect trade via Istanbul.⁵⁴ James Brandt, a British merchant and consul based in Trabzon, argued that only the establishment of European firms in Tabriz could make the Trabzon route a success, otherwise Iranian traders would prefer to order goods from Istanbul. Brandt echoed what Burgess had written in 1832: everywhere outside Tabriz, merchants urged British merchants to establish themselves in Iran and sell their goods directly to clients rather than the current system of sales via agents in Tabriz, Erzerum, and Istanbul. At that time, trade from Istanbul via Baghdad and Kermanshah, or via the desert through Khuzestan, had become impractical due to internal troubles in the Baghdad *pashaliq*, and thus caravans traveled via Erzerum and Tabriz.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Fowler, *Three Years in Persia*, vol. 2, 237; Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 147–48. For a description of the Trabzon-Tabriz route, including transportation costs and customs duties, see Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 9–11, 49–51.

⁵¹ According to Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, 524–25, Abbas Mirza sent agents to London to contact and induce British firms to trade with Iran through Trabzon. The first shipment to Trabzon was a failure, but the second attempt (presumably in 1830) was successful.

⁵² Fowler, *Three Years in Persia*, vol. 2, 234; Abrahamian, "A Brief Note Respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia, Addressed to T.H. Villiers [1832]," 281–82; Schwartz, *Letters from Persia written by Charles and Edward Burgess 1828–1855*, 4. However, according to a British consular source, the first direct importer was James Brant, who chartered an English ship in 1830 to make the voyage to Trabzon. See Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 93, n. 2; Idem, "The Tabriz-Tabriz Trade," 19. According to von Hagemester, *Der europäische Handel in der Türkei und in Persien*, 62, an Armenian traveled to Great Britain and returned with carefully selected British goods, which he imported via Trabzon into Tabriz, in 1823. This may have been Sadeq Beg, assuming that von Hagemester heard or had the date wrong.

⁵³ Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 132–34; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106; Idem, "The Tabriz-Tabriz Trade," 19–21; Ataev, *Togrovo-Ekonomicheskie Sviazi Irana c Rossiei v XVIII-XIX v*, 118–20; von Hagemester, *Der europäische Handel in der Türkei und in Persien*, 68; Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 53.

⁵⁴ The British envoy had already submitted some of these arguments in 1820, supported by patterns of European manufactures sold in Tabriz. See Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 97 (Willcock to Castlereagh, October 30, 1820); Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 123. For the French position, see Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 435–42 (letter by the envoy, E. Des Bassayns de Richemont to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated May 20, 1825, from Tabriz).

⁵⁵ Abrahamian, "A Brief Note Respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia, Addressed to T.H. Villiers [1832]," 286; Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, 248–49, 262–74.

Growing insecurity on the Bushehr-Shiraz and Baghdad-Kermanshah routes coincided with the sharp reduction in trade via the Redout-Kaleh-Tiflis-Erevan-Tabriz route after 1831.⁵⁶ This other commercial route was heavily favored by the Russian government, intended to stimulate the export of its own domestic manufactured goods. It was an alternative to the traditional route via Volga-Astrakhan-Caspian. In the 1790s, via the traditional route, according to Pallas, Russia imported between 6,000 to 8,000 *pud* of silk from Iran, paying over 1,000,000 rubles in goods and specie for both the silk and rent for Caspian fisheries. The value of other Iranian imports (spun and raw cotton, madder, galls, fabrics, pelts, and dried fruit) was small and amounted to some 100,000 rubles per year. Russia had a trade deficit with Iran and only exported a few goods, valuing about 220,000 rubles, part of which were foreign imports. The main export goods were cochineal, broadcloth, and velvet (180,000 rubles), and the remaining consisted of leather, sugar, paper, small mirrors, iron and copper ware, and spices (40,000 rubles). Russian merchants in Astrakhan could not compete with European merchants, who imported large quantities of West European goods at low prices. Although land transport via Aleppo was high, contrariwise customs duties were lower than at Izmir (5 percent) and Erzerum (10 percent). Russian merchants had to pay a 25 percent import duty on European goods in addition to the cost of sea and land transport. Thus, Pallas concluded:

As the balance, therefore, to trade with Persia is against us, it is worthy of investigation in what manner our commercial intercourse could be rendered, if not profitable, at least, less detrimental to the interest of the Empire, and in my opinion, we possess the means of affecting that desirable purpose.⁵⁷

While Pallas made a proposal for how to improve Russia's current account deficit with Iran, it was not pursued due to political changes in Russia and its partial conquest of the Caucasus, including the annexation of Georgia. Gamba, the French consul at Tiflis, wanted to develop Georgia and make its capital the entrepôt of the Caucasus for trade with Iran. Therefore, he convinced Yermolov, the governor-general of the Caucasus, to propose that the Tsar allow foreign merchants to import European goods via Tiflis. The Tsar immediately agreed and issued the relevant *ukase* on October 8, 1821. Gamba also urged the French government, and by extension French traders, to support this Tiflis route.⁵⁸ Already in 1826, Armenian trade between Tiflis, Gilan, and Tabriz allegedly amounted to some 1.6 million rubles of Russian goods, including glass, crystals, coarse calicoes, sugar, nankeens, prints, etc. This was a considerable increase compared to 1819, in which the total goods imported and exported at Tiflis amounted to 471,216 rubles and 28,954 rubles respectively.⁵⁹

Russia also carried on substantial trade via the Volga-Astrakhan route, shipping goods via the Caspian to Lenkoran and then by horse to Tabriz.⁶⁰ The Tabriz market was also supplied via other Caspian ports, such as Enzeli. In July 1829, it was reported:

⁵⁶ Redout-Kaleh, Redut-Kaleh, or Redoubt-Kaleh, a Russian fort and port on the Black Sea coast, fifteen km north of Poti, at the mouth of the river Khobi. It is called Kulevi (Georgia) today.

⁵⁷ Pallas, *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise in die südlichen Statthalterschaften des Rußischen Reichs in den Jahren 1793 und 1794*, vol. 1, 157, 191–99; Ferrieres-Sauveboeuf, *Memoires historiques, politiques et geographiques des voyages du comte du F-S faits en Turquie, en Perse et en Arabie depuis 1782 jusq'en 1789*, vol. 2, 5; Dupré, *Voyage en Perse fait dans les années 1807, 1808, 1809*, vol. 2, 387–88; Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780–1828*, 36–37.

⁵⁸ Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 435–42 (letter by the envoy, E. Des Bassayns de Rlichemont to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated May 20, 1825 from Tabriz); *The Oriental Herald*, 285–87. The timing was perhaps influenced by the Irano-Ottoman border conflict of 1820–22, which made the unattractive Tiflis route cheaper than the Erzerum route. However, that advantage came to an end after 1823, and, not entirely correct, Atkin submits: “trade reverted to the usual routes.” Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1780–1828*, 151–52 (concerning the problems of the Tiflis road).

⁵⁹ *The Oriental Herald*, 206, 285.

⁶⁰ *The Oriental Herald*, 206.

Last year a manufacturer of Schuja sent printed calicoes and nankeens to the value of 300,000 rubles to the Persian port Zinzili [sic; Enzeli], on the Caspian. Part of his goods was sent to Tauris, where they were sold at 30 per ct. profit; the remainder was sold to advantage at Zinzili. The clerk who was sent with them is expected in a short time at Bacow [sic; Baku], to receive another consignment of the same value.⁶¹

The unintended drawback of the Tiflis-Tabriz route was that it allowed European goods to pass without heavy taxation, thus harming Russia's domestic industry. Despite the preponderant role of Russian trade with Iran (see below), it lost market share to West European goods. One reason for this was the opposition of Armenian merchants in Tabriz, who monopolized its foreign trade, to Tiflis developing into an entrepôt. Another reason was that Iranian consumers preferred West European goods, British in particular, if the price was right.⁶² Another contributing factor was that wearing silk clothes had fallen out of fashion among Iran's middle classes and more modest and cheaper fabrics had been adopted in harmony with their reduced means; as a result, people had generally adopted chintzes as their fabric of choice.⁶³ Despite the high cost of the Tiflis-Tabriz route, traders continued to engage in this speculative trade using this route because large profits were made on Leipzig wares—as much as 80 percent, but generally 30–40 percent.⁶⁴ In 1825, the situation was described as follows in a New York newspaper:

A German Paper contains the following interesting observations on the trade with Persia, as it is conducted by the Persian merchants, who attend the great fair at Leipsic: "The Persians who were here at the Easter Fair were here again at the close of the last fair, and gave us some hopes for the approaching Easter fair. They are men who are extremely well versed in trade and business, who are now visiting the manufactories in Germany and Alsace, in order to see what goods may be suitable for their own country, and which, according to the present Russian system, can pass in transit at the least expense by way of Leipsic. In future they will bring hither silk and Cachmere wool, and as they say, and give us reason to hope, will make considerable purchases: but the ornaments must be more in the oriental style than is usual in our goods. Those which they want will go farther into the interior of Asia, where German, English and French goods have not yet found their way; they also study the predominant taste at the Leipsic fair with respect to the manufactures of their own country, which may meet with a ready sale at Leipsic. The low duty on the transit of goods through Russia facilitates the trade by this channel, which may in time become important. On the other hand, the trade with Russian Poland is subject to many difficulties, but this is attended with the disadvantages to Russia, that its furs must be sold in the China market much lower than formerly, while ordinary Canada furs meet with a sale in Leipsic."⁶⁵

⁶¹ *The Atlas* (Saturday, 26 September, 1829). Schuja is situated about 200 km northwest of Moscow, in the Ivanovo oblast. Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 1346. The merchant referred to was Posilini, see Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 1, 17; *ibid.*, vol. 2, 57–58.

⁶² Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 325. According to Burgess, there was great interest in British goods. Abrahamian, "A Brief Note Respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia, Addressed to T.H. Villiers [1832]," 284–85. This was also emphasized by Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces and the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea*, 368.

⁶³ Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 132–34; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106; *Idem*, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 19f; Ataev 1993, 118–20.

⁶⁴ MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 625; Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 132–34; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106; *Idem*, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 19f; Ataev 1993, 118–20.

⁶⁵ *New-York American* (Friday, 29 April, 1825) and *New-York Spectator* (Friday, 6 May, 1825); Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 1109–10. In 1826, it was reported:

The Russian government was angry that its *ukases* did not have the desired effect, i.e., making Georgia the entrepôt between Istanbul and Iran.⁶⁶ By opening the transit of European goods through the Caucasus, Armenian merchants reacted to consumer preferences for West European products and began importing German and, above all, British cottons rather than Russian. When the increased prosperity promised for the Caucasus was less than expected, Russian manufacturers pushed the Russian government to decide to no longer favor the transit trade of European goods. Thus, the Russian government closed the Redout-Kaleh port to secure the supply of its own goods for the Caucasus and Iranian markets. Henceforth, these had to pay normal Russian customs duties, effectively closing this route to European goods.⁶⁷

The *ukase* of 1831 ruined the Redout-Kaleh-Tiflis-Tabriz trade.⁶⁸ The result was not what the Russian government had intended or hoped, as Armenian merchants continued to frequent the Leipzig and Hamburg fairs, but, rather than importing their goods via Russia, shipped them via Trieste and other Adriatic ports to Istanbul and on to Tabriz. Trabzon replaced Redout-Kaleh, despite the fact that its roadstead was not always secure. Iranian merchants preferred Trabzon to Scutari, and thus moved their business there. The establishment of a regular steamboat service between Istanbul and Trabzon made the latter prosper.⁶⁹ This new situation made the Trabzon road a more attractive one, despite its less attractive aspects (i.e., arbitrary fees and bad road).

1831 was the first year that a large shipment of goods from Trabzon came to Tabriz. From then, trade only increased due to Central Asian demand for European goods.⁷⁰ As a result, the Trabzon-Tabriz route quickly developed and fully displaced the import of West European commodities via the Tiflis-Tabriz route. There was still some import of prints and colored cottons from India via Bushehr, but it was a dwindling trade.⁷¹ Because the Trabzon route was quite attractive to British importers, words bandied about the subject for years were replaced by action, and Manchester goods flooded the Iranian market. In reaction to these developments and other pressures, the British government established a consulate in Trabzon in 1831.⁷² In 1836, 16 Armenian merchants from Tiflis and Qarabagh imported goods to the value of 2,959,892 rubles to Tabriz. This was a considerable increase from 1832 (960,000), 1833 (432,000), 1834 (478,000), and 1835 (2,124,000).⁷³

“merchants from Tiflis, the so-called Persians, were said to have bought [goods to the value of] 700,000 Thaler at the Leipzig Fair.” *Allgemeine Handels-Zeitung*, 292.

⁶⁶ Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 152 (he also doubted that it could actually have worked, 153–54).

⁶⁷ Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828–1914*, 21–23; Ataev, *Togrovo-Ekonomicheskie Sviazi Irana c Rossiei v XVIII-XIX v*, 103, 118–20; Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 132–34; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 95–96, 106; Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 214–15.

⁶⁸ MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 625.

⁶⁹ Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 132–34; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106; Ataev, *Togrovo-Ekonomicheskie Sviazi Irana c Rossiei v XVIII-XIX v*, 118–20; Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, 96. In 1830, the Rev. Smith wrote: “its harbor is very bad and its trade small.” Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 322. On the quick rise in trade in Trabzon as of 1831, see Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 64.

⁷⁰ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 65.

⁷¹ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 96–98; Nateq, *Iran dar Rahyabi-ye Farhangi 1834–1848*, 209–14; Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 49–52, 74–80; Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 147–48. On the textile trade, see Floor, *The Importation of Textiles into Qajar Iran*.

⁷² Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 147–48.

⁷³ Von Hagemeister, *Der europäische Handel in der Türkei und in Persien*, 74–75. In 1835 and 1836, Armenian merchants bought goods to the value of 230,000 Dutch gold ducats at the Leipzig Eastern Fair. Nischwitz, *Handels-Geographie und Handelsgeschichte. Zweiter oder Spezieller Teil*, 107.

Table 3: Imports into Tabriz by origin 1833-52 (in assignation rubles)⁷⁴

Year	From Constantinople	From Leipzig, Great Britain and France	From Russia	Total
1833	13,303,110	955,200	188,225	15,346,595
1834	14,996,736	1,259,032	1,682,217	17,937,985
1835	28,324,640 *	3,936,978	686,924	32,954,142
1836	33,507,200	5,678,592	904,502	40,090,084
1837	4,424,000	6,664,592 #	1,766,000	12,855,792
1838	8,931,911	5,302,096	505,080	14,739,087
1839	5,676,142	1,534,167	195,777	7,406,087
1840	5,271,052	782,800	404,320	6,458,173
1841	4,296,427	6,538,939	199,592	11,094,959
1842	5,334,341	3,434,224	285,643	9,054,208
1843	3,898,890	3,309,128	82,500	7,316,366
1844	11,165,612	4,426,101	433,429	16,025,143
1845	6,433,939	5,627,506	371,479	12,477,926
1846	11,646,270	6,106,338	326,483	18,079,102
1847	14,647,414	4,061,518	291,263	19,000,179
1848	17,546,285	2,888,778	296,549	20,731,614
1849	14,496,825	3,318,874	385,990	18,201,690
1850	15,419,363	2,465,220	1,063,068	18,947,652
1851	17,598,278	3,743,172	1,143,464	22,484,915
1852	15,243,743	3,233,140	898,203	19,375,086

*plus 5,000 rubles from Hamburg. # includes also goods from Hamburg

Trabzon Becomes Gateway to Tabriz.

Trade with Russia via Redout-Kaleh immediately fell off, although an immediate increase in trade with Iran via Erzerum did not materialize.⁷⁵ Table 3 shows an enormous increase in trade from 1833 to 1836, which I am unable to explain, as it is unlikely that trade immediately exploded via a hitherto barely used route. Even if one assumes that, for the years 1833–36, shipments from the Istanbul-Erzerum route were included, these figures are still very much at odds with the development of trade after 1836. Moreover, they are contradicted by import data for Trabzon (see Tables 4, 6, and 8), which, in bales, is considered more reliable than customs financial data. Also, it is more likely that the increase of trade via Trabzon, as shown in Table 3, developed at a more gradual pace, due to the use of the new route.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 221.

⁷⁵ MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 636 submits that there was no immediate increase of trade via Trabzon; see however, Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 127. The distances on the new route were: Trabzon-Erzerum: 198 miles; Erzerum-Persian border: 156 miles; border to Tabriz: 162 miles; Tabriz to Tehran: 344 miles, or a total of 860 miles. In 1907, travel time under normal conditions was from Trabzon to the Persian border: 24 days; from the border to Tehran: 33 days. United States 1909, 49.

⁷⁶ For imports into and export from Iran as a share in the trade of Trabzon, see Issawi, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 25–26, Table 1. When Trabzon became the gateway to Iran, this table shows that its own trade also increased

Table 4: Imports and exports into and from Iran via Trabzon 1833–1842⁷⁷

Year	Imports to Iran/ bales	Imports to Iran/ florins	Exports from Iran/ bales	Exports from Iran/ florins
1831	4,500	-	-	-
1832	6,750	-	5,302	-
1833	8,075	-	8,040	-
1834	11,250	-	12,660	-
1835	15,525	-	15,800	-
1836	20,615	-	23,278	-
1837	16,710	-	16,031	-
1838	22,360	-	16,618	-
1839	21,095	-	10,891	-
1840	25,830	-	16,770	-
1841	27,092	-	17,433	-
1842	30,985	-	17,493	-
1843	31,690	10,140,800	14,879	2,518,000
1844	33,100	10,432,000	16,900	3,684,360
1845	40,028	13,230,574	17,012	3,708,742
1846	38,980	12,892,592	13,615	3,165,390
1847	34,850	11,522,738	12,130	2,784,500
1848	50,277	16,623,804	10,436	1,813,782

After all, without prior and proper organization of the logistical requirements (e.g., pack-animals, warehouses), a sudden increase in imports cannot take place.

The figures in Tables 3 to 8 are based on data that British and Russian consuls collected from the Customs-house. This means these figures only reflect trends in imports and exports rather than giving a completely truthful picture of Tabriz's foreign trade. This is due to a number of factors. First, the customs authorities did not want to present a true picture of trade, as this would give the authorities a better understanding how much money they were making and result in a higher customs price for the right to farm. Moreover,

no separate note is kept of the precise quantity of each description of merchandize that may reach or quit it. Customs-duties being levied at the rate of so much per horse-load, those goods that pay the same duty are noted under one head. Thus we have shawls, carpets, and dried-leather all jumbled together.⁷⁸

As for trade with Turkey, the situation was easier because the number of pack-animals was precisely recorded. Although the exact value of their loads was unknown, a fair estimate was arrived at with the help of knowledgeable merchants. Also, a significant share of imports

significantly during the nineteenth century. Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Study*, vol. 2, 205 observed: in 1842, 32,000 packages left Trabzon for Tabriz; in 1898, this trade was more than 5,000 tons.

⁷⁷ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 64. For the years 1848–1900, see Issawi, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 26–27, Table 2.

⁷⁸ AP 30/LXIII (1861), p. 60.

never reached Tabriz, as they were channeled via Khoy and other western districts; such were not noted in Tabriz customs-house's returns. These districts also traded directly with the Caucasus region. It also happened that goods from Russia were imported via Ardabil or Rasht and paid customs duties there, and thus not shown in Tabriz customs records. Furthermore, there was much smuggling into Russia, mainly by natives of Qaradagh, in particular of higher-quality British prints, Swiss manufactures, and European and Iranian silks. In fact, about ten percent of all European fabrics imported were smuggled into Russia. In 1859, the amount smuggled was estimated at £400,000, even higher than official Iranian exports to Russia.⁷⁹

Henceforth, Russia traded mainly via Astrakhan; a trade carried on by Armenians from Tiflis and Qarabagh. In 1833, Russian imports had a value of 2,960,000 paper rubles, while Iranian exports of raw silk and other commodities amounted to 7,419,000 paper rubles. Tabriz had become the most commercial city of Iran.⁸⁰ In fact, Tabriz was the main market for European imports and even some Asian imports, such as sugar and tea.⁸¹ The abovementioned developments resulted in a considerable drop in imports via southern Iran, from which trade partly moved to the Trabzon-Tabriz route, establishing the dominance of this northern route for the next forty years. This not only held for textiles, the major article of import, but also sugar. A further factor was the introduction of steam navigation between Istanbul and Trabzon in 1826, which was expanded thereafter and reduced transportation cost significantly.⁸² By then, Tabriz had become more important than Bushehr, which offered a more expensive route for British goods than via Trabzon.⁸³

However, trade via Erzerum to Tabriz had not yet amounted to £750,000 per year, of which two-thirds was British, as Burgess claimed in 1832.⁸⁴ Burgess was not alone in his enthusiasm, as Fowler also reported that British imports increased from £10,000 to £1,000,000 in the 1830s.⁸⁵ According to a breakdown of Tabriz's trade in 1840, imports were only slightly above £600,000, rising to £831,000 in 1848, of which Great Britain supplied 90 percent.⁸⁶ However, another source estimated trade with Europe at about £1,400,000 in 1840, which seems too high given the trends shown in Tables 3 and 4. In that same year, Russian trade via the Volga and Caspian allegedly amounted to £360,000, consisting mostly of fabrics and manufactures, glassware, mirrors, porcelain and earthenware, etc. The value of British, French, German, and Belgian manufactures was estimated at £1,000,000 (25,000,000 francs), of which French fabrics represented 600,000 francs, almost 16 percent of total trade.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ AP, "Remarks by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade of Tabreez for the Year ending 20th March, 1863," 200; AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1873," 204; AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1870," 240 (smuggling was on the rise); Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 67 (the Iranian-Russian border, the Aras River, was not well monitored, as opposed to the Russian-Turkish border).

⁸⁰ MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 636. This figure refers to total trade between Iran and Russia, not to trade via Tabriz.

⁸¹ Floor, *Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran*, 334–35; Idem, "Tea Consumption and Imports in Qajar Iran," 73–74.

⁸² Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 92–103; Idem, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 19–21; Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, 262–63; Floor, *Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran*, 334–35; Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 9.

⁸³ The British envoy had already submitted some of these arguments, supported by patterns of European manufactures sold in Tabriz, in 1820. See Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 97 (Willock to Castlereagh, October 30, 1820).

⁸⁴ Abrahamian, "A Brief Note Respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia, Addressed to T.H. Villiers [1832]," 293.

⁸⁵ Fowler, *Three Years in Persia*, vol. 2, 236.

⁸⁶ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 108; Idem, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 25–26. French observers also noted the increased demand for British goods. Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, vol. 2, 37.

⁸⁷ MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 636.

Table 5: Value of Annual Imports of Various Classes of Textiles and Total Imports into Tabriz (1837–1904) in British £

Year	Cottons total	Cottons plain	Cottons colored	Woolen goods	Woolen cloth	Total imports
1837	600,000	-	-	-	-	-
1839	450,000	-	-	-	-	-
1840	-	-	-	-	-	600,00
1844	562,000	-	-	-	-	-
1848	771,943	-	-	-	24,000	831,000
1850	762,003	-	-	-	-	-
1858	1,368,300	-	-	-	-	-
1859	1,518,207	-	-	-	-	1,768,488
1862	1,240,000	-	-	-	-	1,460,000*
1863	815,000	-	-	-	-	-
1864	1,575,000	-	-	-	64,000	-
1865	1,242,516	-	-	-	105,840	1,669,231
1866	1,107,441	-	-	-	-	-
1867	944,997	219,433	725,564	-	105,154	1,432,069
1868	1,017,885	-	-	-	9,730	1,351,005
1869	1,123,211	-	-	-	7,800	1,575,776
1870	864,000	160,00	704,000	-	28,000	1,094,717
1871	611,280	148,360	422,920	-	43,600	789,559
1872	1,000,000	200,000	800,000	-	36,000	1,267,100
1873	886,366	181,220	705,146	-	59,150	1,176,392
1877	440,000	90,000	350,000	-	6,000	525,500
1885	429,271	16,406	402,865	9,562	64,500	721,730
1886	484,500	49,500	435,000	-	60,705	795,370
1887	439,586	180,900	312,686	77,040	98,720	910,108
1888	393,222	138,205	255,017	36,000	46,680	664,196
1889	501,836	173,333	328,503	30,000	44,483	853,981
1893	188,758	74,554	114,204	17,000	25,400	411,541
1894	15,999	5,454	10,545	1,909	-	350,339
1895	11,335	10,000	1,335	2,000	6,000	534,820
1896	26,440	9,940	16,500	2,040	8,000	648,920
1898	306,000	104,000	202,000	7,000	34,000	682,330
1899	25,212	7,577	17,635	3,769	5,538	723,174

(Continued)

Table 5: (Continued.)

Year	Cottons total	Cottons plain	Cottons colored	Woolen goods	Woolen cloth	Total imports
1902	374,545	-	-	116,581	-	1,235,883
1903	585,733	-	-	183,464	-	1,796,548
1904	459,239	-	-	167,358	-	1,394,780
1905	433,467	-	-	144,650	-	1,373,097

Source: Issawi 1971, pp. 106, 108, 114 (1837); MacGregor 1850, vol. 2, p. 636; AP 67 (1873), p. 36 (for 1837, 1839, 1844, 1848, 1850); AP 30 (1861), pp. 62-63; AP 30-1 (1864), p. 200; AP 32 (1866), pp. 475-76; AP 29 (1867-68), pp. 59-60; AP 29 (1867-68), pp. 501-02; AP 29 (1871), p. 237; AP 30 (1871), p. 960; AP 23 (1872), p. 1189; AP 34 (1875), p. 204; AP 30 (1878), p. 198; DCR 69 (Tabreez, 1885-86), p. 3; DCR 231 (Tabreez, 1886-87), p. 4; DCR 445 (Tabreez, 1887-88), p. 7; DCR 611 (Tabreez, 1888-89), p. 2; DCR 798 (Tabreez, 1889-90), p. 6; DCR 1440 (Azerbaijan, 1893-94), p. 3; DCR 1569 (Azerbaijan, 1894-95), p. 2; DCR 1968 (Azerbaijan, 1896-97), p. 2; DCR 2291 (Azerbaijan, 1898-99), p. 4; DCR 2685 (Azerbaijan, 1900-01), p. 4-7; DCR 3308 (Azerbaijan, 1902-04), p. 4; DCR 3507 (Azerbaijan, 1904-05), p. 4; DCR 3736 (Azerbaijan, 1905-06), p. 4.

* indicates that the total does not include Russian imports.

Between 1840 and 1880, as a consequence of Russian trade policy, British cottons from Manchester had a practical monopoly over the Iranian market.⁸⁸ This had not always been the case, however, because prior to 1830, Iran had mainly been supplied with textiles (and other goods) via Russia; textiles bought mainly by Armenian merchants (Russian subjects in many cases) at the annual Leipzig Fair and other European markets. Thus, such textiles were composed of German, Swiss, British, and other European fabrics.

By the 1840s, European fabric imports had become a real avalanche.⁸⁹ Iran did not have the means to create trade barriers, however, assuming it even had the capacity to enforce such barriers. The Treaty of Torkmanchai of 1828 determined a fixed *ad valorem* rate of five percent on Russian imports and *pari passu* on imports from European countries enjoying the “most-favored-nation” status. Russia, before Britain, had started to flood the Iranian market with its prints, broadcloth, and plated goods (*ouvrages placqués*). Russian chintzes were of mediocre colors and little solidity, and its designs were of inferior taste, but the cloth was almost always of good quality. Iranian consumers preferred to buy inferior textiles at low cost from Russia and India, rather than French and British ones, which were nicer and stronger, but also more expensive.⁹⁰ In fact, during the 1830s, Russia had the monopoly of this market segment and its merchants made considerable profits.⁹¹ Therefore, foreign trade in Tabriz in the 1830s was in Russian hands.

Brant argued that Great Britain needed to create an attractive environment for British trade, for its major competitor, Russia, carried on a considerable trade with northern Iran. Not only Russian goods, but also German goods bought at Nizhni Novgorod, were taken via Tiflis to Tabriz. Armenian merchants imported goods from Nizhni-Novgorod, where the fair ended at the end of August, arriving in Tabriz in November. This represented an annual commercial turnover of £1.5 million. The import of manufactures consisted

⁸⁸ AP, “Report by Mr. Dickson Acting Consul-General at Tabreez for 1859,” 60–61; see also AP, “Remarks by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade of Tabreez for the Year ending 20th March, 1863,” 199–200. In the 1840s, Swiss goods were a major competitor. See Nateq 1368, 219–20.

⁸⁹ Adib al-Molk, *Dafe' al-Ghorur*, 265.

⁹⁰ *The Oriental Herald*, 206; Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 137–43; Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 432–33.

⁹¹ Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 132–34; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, 106; Idem, “The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade,” 19f; Ataev, *Togrovo-Ekonomicheskie Sviazi Irana c Rossiei v XVIII-XIX v*, 118–20.

principally of Russian fabrics, brought down from Tiflis by the [Armenian] Georgian merchants, to the amount of nearly a million of ducats annually, paying an *ad valorem* duty of five per cent. These merchants were protected by a Russian consul.⁹²

As far as prints and colored cottons were concerned, Europeans realized that, to sell textiles in Iran, they had to cater to the tastes of the market. Fraser drew attention to the need for careful planning of both design and colors in the 1820s, and Burgess in the 1830s reported, “a great taste for British cottons prevails all over these countries,” alongside Burnes.⁹³ European exporters took heed. They imitated, as closely as possible, Persian designs, patterns, and fabrics. Some European manufacturers had draughtsmen in Iran to copy local designs, on the basis of which tissues were manufactured. British officials such as Burnes and Abbott were sent to reconnoiter the market and its demand. Russia had an advantage: its Moslem subjects had similar demands to the Persian ones. However, closer and more frequent contacts via the Istanbul market, Leipzig Fair, and other similar fairs led to a desire for the more modern West European goods. As a result, Persian consumers abandoned both local and Russian products.⁹⁴ By 1870, if not earlier,

the patterns of the printed cottons are designed in Paris expressly for the Persian market, and vary very frequently according to the caprice of the native dealers. The quality is inferior, but the low price secures for the fabrics of Manchester the monopoly of the market.⁹⁵

From the 1830s until 1870, the Trabzon-Tabriz trade route was the main channel for imported textiles. Tabriz supplied most of northern and western Iran throughout the entire period.⁹⁶ Consequently, Iran had an account deficit with the Ottoman Empire (see [Tables 3 and 5](#)) due to its import of European goods. This deficit was counterbalanced by an account surplus in trade with Russia. Due to smuggling, this surplus was higher than customs data indicates, as, at the end of the 1850s, smuggling amounted to £360,000 or more per year.⁹⁷ In any event, as it pertains to trade with Iran, Russia had a negative trade balance.

The data shows that the import of textiles was the most important branch of commercial activity. In fact, cottons dominated imports and, in value, were higher than all other goods imported into Tabriz together.⁹⁸ From the mid-1840s to mid-1850s, 70 percent of all goods

⁹² Fowler, *Three Years in Persia*, vol. 2, 233; Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 52, 88–91.

⁹³ Fraser, *Travels and Adventures in the Persian Provinces and the Southern Banks of the Caspian Sea*, 367; Schwartz, *Letters from Persia written by Charles and Edward Burgess 1828–1855*, 34, 84; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 107; Mignan, *A Winter Journey through Russia, the Caucasus Alps, and Georgia*, vol. 2, 139; and Abrahamian, “A Brief Note Respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia, Addressed to T.H. Villiers [1832],” 284; Burnes, *Cabool: A Personal Narrative of a Journey to, and residence in that City, in the Years 1836, 7, and 8*, vol. 3, 451–52.

⁹⁴ Blau, *Die kommerzielle Zustände Persiens*, 123–24. Most import textiles, formerly made in Iran, were now imitated in Great Britain and Germany. French fabrics were preferred over British. MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 636.

⁹⁵ AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1870,” 238.

⁹⁶ MacLean, *Report on the Conditions and Prospects of British Trade in Persia*, 46; AP 29/LXVIII (1866), p. 297 (madders, pinks, lawns); Texier, *Description de l'Arménie, la Perse et la Mésopotamie*, vol. 1, 51. According to E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Montazam-e Naseri*, vol. 1, 561, Tabriz's annual customs revenues in 1880 amounted to over 300,000 tumans—as compared to a mere 12,000 tumans in 1813—an indication of its increased trade. He estimated the size of Tabriz's trade in 1880 at 10,000,000 tumans. For his list of the type and quantity of imports, see E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Montazam-e Naseri*, 562–63.

⁹⁷ AP, “Remarks by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade of Tabreez for the Year ending 20th March, 1863,” 200–01. Later, however, smuggling fell off due to better border controls. AP 29/LXVIII (1867–68), p. 60.

⁹⁸ AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1870,” 238.

imported via Trabzon were cottons, mostly English (80 percent), Swiss (15 percent), and German (5 percent).⁹⁹ Russia also exported some cottons, but such were of marginal importance in value terms. Switzerland and Germany only exported dyed and printed stuffs. British imports consisted of 65 percent dyed (long cloths, madapolams, muslins) and 35 percent plain cottons.¹⁰⁰ The latter were transformed in Iran for re-export to Russia, which represented about 10 percent of the imported volume.¹⁰¹ Textiles remained the single most important group of imported goods, even though the textiles' share of Tabriz's total imports dropped from 74 to 32 percent (see Table 5).¹⁰² Other imports were mostly haberdasheries, glass and glassware, sugar, matches, metals, petroleum, tea, drugs, and sundries, whose volume changed over time.

In 1850, Abbott estimated that 90 percent of cotton imports were of British origin, certainly in northern and central Iran, and, as total imports were concerned, Great Britain was the main importer, comprising about 80 percent of total imports.¹⁰³ Blau, a contemporary Austrian government official, pointed out that Russia exported very few cottons (from Erevan and Tiflis), and what it did export was of inferior quality to those from West Europe. Therefore, only lower classes in the areas adjacent to the Russian border bought them.¹⁰⁴ Until the 1880s, Manchester cottons faced no serious competition from their Russian counterparts, despite the fact that, already since 1848, it had been noted that British cottons left much to be desired in terms of suitability and quality, especially over time. However, the existing network of commercial, financial, and transportation incentives proved an effective facilitator for the oft-well-connected, large West-European firms.¹⁰⁵ Also, despite Russia's proximity, its system of communications was underdeveloped and well-capitalized Russian merchants were absent from the Iranian market. Furthermore, Russian products, although cheap, were also of inferior quality.¹⁰⁶ By 1890, however, Russia changed its foreign trade policy and began an all-out attack on its competitors, whether Iranian or foreign. As a result, the British monopolistic market position came under severe attack all over the north. The Russians marketed colored goods only; all the plain ones remained British or Indian. In Tabriz in the 1890s, there was a steady demand for prints, which were imported via Trabzon, Khoy, or Baghdad.¹⁰⁷ In 1895, Harris reported: "the duties on goods crossing

⁹⁹ Blau, *Die kommerzielle Zustände Persiens*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ Madapolam is a soft cotton fabric manufactured from fine yarns with a dense pick laid out in linen weave.

¹⁰¹ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 58; Blau, *Die kommerzielle Zustände Persiens*, 124–25. In 1864, prints represented 60 percent and plain cottons 40 percent of imported textiles. AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1865," 474. In 1845, Wagner 1856, vol. 3, 103 observed that shops in Tabriz were filled with European and Russian products, including portraits of Russian generals sold in Armenian shops.

¹⁰² DCR 113 (1887), 7.

¹⁰³ Amanat, *Cities & Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran 1847–1866*, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Blau, *Die kommerzielle Zustände Persiens*, 130–31.

¹⁰⁵ DCR 445, "Report for the Year 1887–88 on the Trade of Tabreez by W.G. Abbott," 1; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 72, 104.

¹⁰⁶ AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Keith Abbott on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1866," 63. The Russian supply route via Poti became more competitive, partly due to the Ottoman government's neglect of the Trabzon-Erzurum road. AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade and Commerce for the Year 1867," 501; Issawi, "The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade," 22–23.

¹⁰⁷ DCR 2291, "Report on the Trade and Commerce of Azerbaijan for the Year 1898–99 by Cecil G. Wood," 6. Although cheap and even cheaper goods appealed to the Persian shopkeeper and consumer alike, there were limits. For example, when very cheap and bad cotton goods were imported to Isfahan via Hamadan (to compete with those imported via Bushehr) in 1894–95, consumers found them to be of such bad quality (bad dyes, which quickly disappeared) that both shopkeepers and consumers got sick of them. The latter remonstrated with shopkeepers, who, if they did not loose the "wordy warfare," certainly suffered in reputation in the bazaar. DCR 1953, "Report on the Trade and Commerce of the Consular District of Ispahan for the Year 1896 by Preece," 8.

Table 6: Tabriz's Total Imports and Exports in £ (1837–1905)

Year	Imports	Via Turkey	Via Turkey bales	Via Russia	British	Exports	Via Turkey	Via Turkey bales	Via Russia	Silk
1831		-	4,500				-	-		
1832		-	6,750				-	5,302		
1833		-	8,975				-	8,040		
1834		-	11,250				-	12,660		
1835		-	15,525				-	15,800		
1836		-	20,615				-	23,278		
1837	985,000	-	16,710		600,000	105,000	-	16,031		n.a.
1838		-	22,360				-	16,618		
1839	591,925	-	21,095		450,000	464,219	-	10,891		214,180
1840		-	25,830				-	16,770		
1841		-	27,092				-	17,483		
1842		-	30,985				-	17,493		
1843		1,014,080	31,690				251,800	14,879		
1844	703,204	1,043,200	33,100		562,000	369,057	368,436	16,900		131,418
1845		1,323,957	40,028				370,874	17,012		
1846		1,289,259	38,980				316,539	13,615		
1847		1,152,273	34,850				278,450	12,130		
1848	833,773	1,662,380	50,277		771,943	343,738	181,378	10,456		144,030
1850	882,175				762,003	607,128				236,434
1858	1,639,225	1,589,071		50,154	1,368,300	974,942	576,535		-	389,300
1859	1,786,425	1,749,407		37,081	n.a.	956,140	567,577		379,563*	n.a.
1861	-	-		-	-	-	-		-	544,666

1862	-	-	-	1,000,000	-	-	-	393,778
1863	1,460,000	-	-	815,000	534,000	-	-	351,000
1864	1,800,000	-	-	1,575,000	600,000	-	-	502,000
1865	1,669,231	-	-	1,242,516	886,883	-	-	499,322
1866	1,780,260	1,699,712	80,548	1,107,441	883,502	516,626	366,876	374,400
1867	1,432,069	-	-	944,997	643,093	-	-	65,000
1868	1,351,005	-	-	1,017,285	683,885	-	-	80,000
1869	1,575,776	-	-	1,123,211	901,218	-	-	136,400
1870	1,094,717	-	-	864,000	422,632	-	-	116,000
1871	789,559	-	-	611,280	340,790	-	-	119,440
1872	1,267,100	-	-	1,001,000	634,00	-	-	140,000
1873	1,176,392	-	-	886,366	530,997	-	-	91,168
1877	525,000	-	-	350,000	270,900	-	-	7,000
1885	721,730	-	-	491,280	306,687	-	-	12,400*
1886	795,370	-	-	485,000	253,023	-	-	4,829
1887	910,108	-	-	562,586	575,035	-	-	735
1888	664,196	-	-	393,222	413,694	-	-	-
1889	853,981	792,340	61,551	611,836	389,456	123,017	266,439	4,800
1893	411,541	323,604	87,937	233,575	199,617	88,100	111,517	666
1894	350,339	37,327 B	31,913 B	167,934	162,808	7,477	52,843	-
1895	524,820			264,000	256,720			1,000

(Continued)

Table 6: (Continued.)

Year	Imports	Via Turkey	Via Turkey bales	Via Russia	British	Exports	Via Turkey	Via Turkey bales	Via Russia	Silk
1896	648,920				284,400	227,530				-
1897	649,200				282,920	210,700				
1898	682,330	41,679 B		59,042 B	297,300	219,300	8,263		51,905	14,000
1899	723,174				172,652	316,304				13,973
1900	1,204,069				130,837	649,415				-
1902	1,235,883	-		-	229,078	722,487	-		-	-
1903	1,796,548	-		843,426	440,860	575,284	-		-	-
1904	1,394,780	-		733,453	273,438	925,714	-		-	-
1905	1,373,097	-		688,711	306,589	918,562				

Source: Gödel 1849, p. 64; AP 30 (1861) LXIII, p. 60 (*= +£400,000 smuggled); AP 30-31 (1864) LXI, p. 200; AP 25-26 (1865)m LIV-V, p. 268; AP 29 (1867-68) LXVIII, pp. 60-62; AP 29 (1867-68) LXVIII, pp. 501-02; AP 29 (1871) LXV, pp. 237-38; AP 30 (1871) LXVI, p. 960; AP 23 (1872) LXVIII, pp. 1189; AP 34 (1875) LXXV, pp. 204-05; AP 30 (1878) LXXV, p. 1698; DCR 69 (1886), p. 3 (*£60,000 waste silk); DCR 241 (1886-87), pp. 4-5; DCR 445 (1887-88), pp. 6-7; DCR 611 (1888-89), pp. 2-3; DCR 798 (1890-91), pp. 6-7; DCR 1440 (1894), pp. 2-3; DCR 1569 (1895), pp. 2-3; DCR 1968 (1896-97), pp. 2-4; DCR 2291 (1898-99), pp. 3-5; DCR 2685 (1899-1900), pp. 14-16; DCR 3308 (1902-04), pp. 4, 9; DCR 3507 (1904-05), pp. 3, 6, 7; DCR 3736 (1905-06), pp. 4-5, 8.

Russian territory being so exorbitant, all the trade of Northern Persia, with the exception of a very small quantity of Russian manufactured goods, arrives in the country by caravan from Trebizond.” By 1904, however, this was no longer true. British cottons, which only 20 years prior had monopolized the Tabriz market, lost the war against Russian imports. Russia held 65 percent and Britain only 19 percent of the market, the remainder being taken care of by other countries (France, Italy, Germany), whose market share had also been increasing in the preceding decade.¹⁰⁸

For exports from Iran, the situation was different. Russia had always held the position of the most important importer of Iranian goods and a negative trade balance with Iran. The same was true for Tabriz, where Russia was the most important country as far as exports from Tabriz were concerned. Great Britain held the second position, i.e., 10 to 12 percent of export trade with Tabriz, “while France, Austria, Hungary, and Germany bring up the rear.”¹⁰⁹ Until 1868, the major export commodity had been raw silk, but, due to the silk disease in Gilan, its share fell from 30 percent in 1865 to 7.7 percent in 1873 to 0.02 percent in 1898 (see Table 5). It was only in 1875 that carpets picked up some of the slack, and their share of exports increased as of the 1880s. Other export goods consisted of cotton, dried fruit, almonds, tobacco, silken stuff, shawls, rice, spices, furs, and sundries. After 1870, for the reasons mentioned above, Tabriz’s foreign trade suffered a decline. This was particularly significant in 1893–94, when imports fell by £441,500 and exports by £189,834. This was due to the fact that Tehran was more cheaply supplied with Russian goods via the Caspian, caravan hire was cheaper in the south than through Ottoman territory, and the low exchange of silver, which fell 30 percent in a single year (1893–1894).¹¹⁰

Whereas imports started to rise again as of the mid-1890s, almost doubling after 1900, exports remained depressed until 1900, when they also doubled. As of 1904, exports even tripled in value compared with the 1890s (see Table 5).

Tabriz Market Downsized

After 1870, Tabriz lost its place as the main entrepôt for European goods headed for northern Iran. From 1866, a number of external disasters beyond the city’s control caused this decline. These factors included the opening of the Suez Canal and the failure of the silk crop in Gilan due to the spreading silk worm disease, which reduced the province’s purchasing power significantly. This disaster was followed by the general famine of 1871–73, which caused the death of thousands of humans and animals and resulted in reduced demand for imports and higher transportation costs due to lack of transport animals and high cost of fodder. These problems had barely run their course when the Russian-Turkish war of 1877 made the transportation of goods via Poti or Trabzon impossible, as both armies commandeered pack animals to ensure a steady supply of goods.

The rates of transport between Trebizond and Persia rose to 1,250 *pias.* per Kantar-Turkish, against 500 *pias.*, at which they stood before the declaration of war; and muleteers were scarce, as they were engaged by the belligerents to convey stores for their respective armies.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ DCR 3308, “Report for the Years 1902–04 on the Trade of Azerbaijan by C.G. Wratislaw,” 5–7; DCR 3507, “Report for the Years 1904–05 on the Trade of Azerbaijan by C.G. Wratislaw,” 5–7. There was a decrease in the three countries’ rise in the sale of cottons as of 1905, while Russia’s share also did not grow due to strikes in the textile industry. DCR 3736, “Report for the Years 1905–06 on the Trade of Azerbaijan by C.G. Wratislaw,” 5–8.

¹⁰⁹ DCR 445, “Report for the Year 1887–88 on the Trade of Tabreez by W.G. Abbott,” 3.

¹¹⁰ DCR 1440, “Report on the Trade of the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1893–94 by Cecil G. Wood,” 3; Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad via Tiflis, Tabriz and Persian Kurdistan*, 102. The depreciation of the Iranian currency had already begun decades earlier, see Matthee, *Floor and Clawson* 2013, 245–48.

¹¹¹ AP 30/LXXV (1878), p. 1696.

Table 7: Destinations and Total of Export from Tabriz 1833–52 (in assignation rubles)¹¹²

Year	To Russia	To Constantinople	Total
1833	1,658,336	2,980,000	4,638,336
1834	1,275,358	4,929,600	6,204,958
1835	879,308	3,317,280	4,196,588
1836	2,042,000	3,488,000	5,530,000
1837	2,512,760	1,620,000	4,132,700
1838	2,514,204	210,000	2,724,204
1839	2,143,732	2,750,400	4,894,132
1840	2,864,139	3,358,440	6,219,579
1841	2,038,690	2,124,463	4,163,153
1842	2,106,844	2,559,827	2,776,670
1843	2,145,954	3,257,161	5,573,555
1844	4,553,484	3,411,142	8,054,626
1845	3,665,130	7,007,520	10,672,650
1846	4,346,706	3,848,583	8,213,289
1847	4,384,741	4,436,375	8,821,116
1848	4,760,895	3,888,385	8,649,281
1849	4,529,778	5,217,537	9,746,315
1850	6,751,210	6,616,400	13,367,610
1851	5,696,177	4,700,193	10,396,365
1852	4,633,631	8,886,049	13,489,689

Trade via this route was made even less attractive by the discouraging transit of European goods via the Caucasus.¹¹³ In 1846, the Caucasus transit trade had been re-opened to European goods, even liberalized in 1856, but when Russia decided to extend its commercial influence over northern Iran in 1877, transit trade was made difficult. It demanded “payment of deposits equal to the amount of customs that would have to be paid on imports to Russia; these were repaid when passage of the goods into Persia was verified by customs.” In 1883, transit trade was abolished; as a result, Russian exports increased and, by 1885, transit goods had all but disappeared.¹¹⁴ Therefore, major importers were forced to import goods via Baghdad and Kermanshah, which added to the cost and time required.¹¹⁵ Ending the transit

¹¹² Küss, *Handelsratgeber für Persien*, 91; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 84; Idem, “The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade,” 22–27; NA, FO 60/463, Report on the Trade (1884), not foliated.

¹¹³ Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30–50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 222.

¹¹⁴ Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828–1914*, 21–23; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 95–96. Nevertheless, cloth from Yazd and Kashan for the Caucasus was still mainly marketed via Tabriz. Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 301.

¹¹⁵ AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade and Commerce for the Year 1867,” 500; AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Azerbaijan for the Year 1870,” 961; AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1872,” 1190; AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the State of Trade in the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1872,” 968; AP 34/LXXV Tabreez (1875), p. 205; AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1877–8,” 1696.

From Trebizond to Tabreez, from 32 days in winter to 70 days in summer, when the beasts of burden are permitted to pasture along the route.

Tabreez to Teheran, 14 days to 18 days.

Baghdad to Teheran, via Khanakhin, Kermanshah, and Hamadan, about 28 days, according to the season.

Bushire to Teheran, about 46 days, including stoppages.

Bushire to Shiraz, 10 days.

Shiraz to Ispahan, 14 days.

Ispahan to Teheran, 14 days.

Teheran to Tabreez, 18 days.

Figure 1: Various Routes and Distances, in Days Marching, by which Merchandise arrives in Persia¹¹⁶

of European goods through Russia meant that Gilan and Khorasan were directly supplied with Russian goods via Rasht and Astarabad, and via Ashqabad after 1882. The role of the Trabzon-Tabriz route was taken over by the Bushehr-Isfahan and Baghdad-Kermanshah-Hamadan routes, even though the latter meant greater expense and time. The diversion of trade from Tabriz to the southern route was not only due to the virtual ban on the transit of foreign goods through Russia, but, above all, due to the cheaper transportation costs from Europe to the Persian Gulf.¹¹⁷ Bushehr became another important point of entry around 1870; up to that time, textiles reached central Iran via Tabriz and Tehran. Bushehr mainly supplied the needs of Fars and central Iran. In 1873, the import of piece goods at Bushehr was estimated at 17½ lakhs of rupees. The Bushehr route had become more important than Trabzon-Tabriz, and goods that had formerly reached central Iran via Tabriz were now served by Bushehr (see Fig. 1).¹¹⁸

It is interesting to note, in this vein, that merchants based their choice of trade route not merely on transport cost considerations. In the mid-1860s, for example, sugar, which had been carried through Trabzon-Erzurum for decades, was also being imported via Poti-Tiflis. This route was “favored by merchants, since Turkey abandoned again its plan for a carriage road from the Black Sea.”¹¹⁹ However, this trend did not last long, even after the Poti-Tiflis railway was finished and provided cheaper transport than via Turkey. Despite this cost advantage, trade did not move to Poti due to

the neglect and incompetence of the Russian transit agents entail a delay and loss to the Persian importers, more than sufficient to counterbalance the charge of one per cent. levied by the Turkish Government on all goods passing through its territory.¹²⁰

Of course, Russian trade used this route once the railway line from Tiflis to Jolfa had been extended. Also, while this route was faster and cheaper, the Russian tariff on competitive products was prohibitive. As a result, much of the transit trade—in particular of non-competitive goods, such as raisins and almonds—moved to the new railroad between Batum-Poti and Tiflis. This situation did not change in the following years, even though the Trabzon-Erzurum road had been macadamized and in reasonable condition in 1870.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Source: DCR 1440, “Report on the Trade of the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1893–94 by Cecil G. Wood,” 6. For similar data, see Schneider 1990, 90–102 (Tables 7–8, 10, 14–15).

¹¹⁷ Administration Report for 1884–85, 41.

¹¹⁸ Administration Report 1873–74, 13.

¹¹⁹ AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade and Commerce for the Year 1867,” 501.

¹²⁰ AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the State of Trade in the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1872,” 969.

¹²¹ United States 1909, 49. In 1874, the Russian General Adolf von Falkenhagen obtained a concession to construct and operate a railway “between the River Aras, near the village of Jolfa, and the town of Tabreez.” Although cancelled in 1875, this shows that Russia attached great importance to linking Azerbaijan with its railway network to

In 1897, according to the US consul in Trabzon, transport costs were \$3.30 to \$9 per 300 lbs. depending on the availability of camels. For camel owners, there was no insurance available against robbery. The Persian drivers only received \$2.20 per trip and travel time was 35 days. The custom rates between Trabzon and the Persian border were \$0.09 per bale in Trabzon and \$0.13 per bale at Erzerum. An agent could be hired at \$0.35 per bale to take care of the payment and handling of customs rates.¹²²

The British commercial commissioner, McLean, did a market analysis of the Persian market in 1903, which was more pessimistic than the American consul. He wrote in his report:

The construction of the Batoum-Baku Railway and the Akstafa-Julfa road opened to Odessa and Black Sea ports a trade route to Azerbaijan superior in time and cost of transport to the Trebizond route, from which European merchandise for Persia was quickly diverted to it; but this door was soon barred to imports not of Russian origin.*¹²³ The superiority of this route increases as the railway from Tiflis, now open to Erivan, extends to the frontier at Julfa, which it is expected to reach within two years. All these measures of improved communication have been justified by the development of the Russian territories which they have penetrated and benefited but they have equally served to facilitate both import and export trade with Persia. The merchandise which can be most quickly supplied to a depleted market reaps the best profit. There is also a saving of interest and a more rapid turn-over of capital when goods take a shorter time in transit. The improvement in communications with Russia has materially reduced the time occupied in transport, and Russian merchandise now arrives in the markets of northern Persia perhaps three months or less from date of order, whilst our goods can seldom reach the same destinations within five or even six months of order. ... The most important exports to Russia are fruits, cotton and rice, representing a million sterling annually.¹²⁴

MacLean's pessimistic expectations did not materialize, as Tabriz-Erzerum-Trabzon trade increased during 1903–07 due to troubled conditions in Russia and the Caucasus. However, these gains were lost due to unrest in Azerbaijan after 1907. Nevertheless, by 1911, the British consul in Trabzon hoped that trade would pick up again on this route after the return to normal conditions in Azerbaijan.¹²⁵

Although the Trabzon-Tabriz route had lost its comparative advantage--i.e., lower transportation costs--the Iranian government did nothing to correct this situation. In 1886, the British consul in Tabriz, worried about the fall in trade in general and British goods in particular, wrote:

The diversion into other channels of merchandise formerly sent from Trebizond to this province, several districts formerly provided with goods through the Black Sea route now receiving them by the Persian Gulf; and lastly, the total absence of carriageable roads. Improved means of communication can only infuse vitality into this torpid

increase its political and commercial influence over the province. For the text of the concession, see Hurewitz 1956, vol. 1, 387–90. For background, see Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Great Britain in Persia, 1864–1914. A Study in Imperialism*, 134–47. There was also an objective need to improve the road connection between Julfa and Tabriz, which was described, even as late as 1903, as merely “a caravan trail.” Jackson, *Persia Past and Present*, 23.

¹²² United States Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Highways of Commerce*, 953.

¹²³ *Exports to Europe continued to benefit, perhaps at the expense of imports, which had to bear the cost of returning unfreighted caravans to Trebizond.

¹²⁴ MacLean, *Report on the Conditions and Prospects of British Trade in Persia*, 4.

¹²⁵ DCR 5014, “Acting Consul Alvarez, Report on the Trade and Commerce of the Vilayet of Trebizond for the year 1910–11,” 7; United States 1909, p. 49 (Persian imports via Trabzon mostly: cotton goods 35 percent; woolen goods 26 percent; tea 15 percent; silk and velvets 7.5 percent; crockery and glassware 3 percent; other 13.5 percent. Persian Export via Trabzon: carpets 65 percent; silken stuffs 20 percent; sultana raisins 12 percent; other 3 percent. Total=\$870,000).

mass, and by helping to balance the imports correct the pecuniary deficiency referred to above. The urgent necessity of the Persian Government constructing a road from this town to meet with one which is being carried from Erzeroum to Bayazid has been repeatedly pointed out; but it will be too late to do this after Russia, by the construction of a route from the Caspian littoral to Ardebil, has monopolized the trade with the north of Persia, and dealt a final death-blow to the commercial transit between Tabreez and the Trebizond seaboard.¹²⁶

The same complaint was voiced regarding the Ottoman government's lack of interest in road improvement. In particular, British observers pushed for the extension of the trunk railway in Asia Minor to Erzerum, "where it would be joined by a branch line from Rizeh or Trebizond."¹²⁷ Such an extension would also enable the export of crops from high inland plateau Armenia that "so often [were] left to rot for lack of cheap transport."¹²⁸

There were also other trade routes used to import textiles into Azerbaijan. Khoy was one, although it never threatened the role of Tabriz and remained an alternative importing station of mostly regional (western Azerbaijan) importance. Khoy's role is not surprising when one considers that it was a halting station between Trabzon and Tabriz and the natural outlet for northwest Azerbaijan. Customs duties had to be paid at Khoy, but more often at Tabriz.¹²⁹ In 1865, for example, there was an additional import of textiles via Khoy, Salmas, Ormiyeh, Oshnu, and Sowj Bulagh, which were sold across the Aras River in Caucasian markets. There seems to have been 6,815 packages, as compared to 37,652 packages in Tabriz, or about 15 percent of the total of 44,467 packages for northern Iran.¹³⁰ The Baghdad-Kermanshah trade route acquired some importance after the mid-1880s, with Hamadan as the main distribution center supplying central Iran.¹³¹ By 1900, in fact, Kermanshah—via Hamadan—also supplied Khorasan, Kurdistan, Tabriz, Garrus, Tehran, Ardabil, Qom, Kashan, Zenjan, and Isfahan.¹³² Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bandar `Abbas acquired some importance as a conduit for textiles forwarded to Kerman, Mashhad, and Isfahan. This forwarding role was reduced when the export of British textiles to Russia came to an end. Russian

¹²⁶ DCR 69, "Report for the Year 1885 on the Trade of Tabreez by Mr. Consul-General Abbott," 2. In 1888, the government of Iran showed some interest in the problem and had European engineers study the cost of constructing roads from Bayazid via Khoy to Tabriz and onwards to Tehran, and a road between Astara and Ardabil. DCR 611, "Report for the Year 1888–9 on the Trade of Tabreez by W.G. Abbott," 2. However, the next year the British consul concluded that, although money had been collected and much talk had taken place, nothing came of it. DCR 798, "Report on the Trade of North-Western Persia for the Year ending March 21, 1890 by Consul-General C.E. Stewart," 4. Tabriz's ill-paved roads ("a disgrace to the place") were an indication that the government had no real interest in repairing them, even though such would not have required much investment. Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad via Tiflis, Tabriz and Persian Kurdistan*, 104. In 1861, the same situation was also described by Brugsch, *Die Reise der K.K. Gesandtschaft nach Persien 1861–1862*, vol. 1, 173. For the road to Russia, see also E'temad al-Saltaneh, *Montazam-e Naseri*, vol. 3, 1991, who mentions the building of a carriage road from Tehran to the Aras River via Azerbaijan. Therefore, the improvement of a similar Russian road between Rasht and Tehran was unsuccessfully opposed by Mirza Javad Aqa, a leading mojtahed and trade investor from Tabriz, as this might harm Tabriz's trade. Gordon, *Persia Revisited (1895)*, 24.

¹²⁷ Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Study*, vol. 2, 206.

¹²⁸ DCR 5014, "Acting Consul Alvarez, Report on the Trade and Commerce of the Vilayet of Trebizond for the year 1910–11," 7 (French engineers surveyed the Trabzon-Erzerum road in 1911, with the aim of building a highway, but progress was slow and only some 15 km were built).

¹²⁹ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 52.

¹³⁰ AP 30–31 (1864), 200; AP 67 (1866) Tabreez, 471–74; DCR 2291, "Report on the Trade and Commerce of Azerbaijan for the Year 1898–99 by Cecil G. Wood," 6; AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Keith Abbott on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1866," 61.

¹³¹ MacLean, *Report on the Conditions and Prospects of British Trade in Persia*, 46; NA, FO 60/463 Report (1884), not foliated; United States Bureau of Foreign Commerce, *Highways of Commerce*, 944.

¹³² DCR 3189, "Trade of Kermanshah and District for the year 1903–04 by Consular Agent H.L. Rabino," 40. For more details, see Floor, *Kermanshah: City, Society and Trade*, 249–50, 2356–58.

woolens were only imported via Enzeli and destined for Tehran.¹³³ Meanwhile, the southern route remained cheaper. In 1894, the British consul in Tabriz reported:

The rates of transport on the Bushire route are also considerably cheaper than those of Trebizond-Erzeroum, where for the last year [1892–93] they have ruled at 3½ l., per kantar (500 lbs. weight) as against half the amount merchants were accustomed to pay.¹³⁴

Merchants of Tabriz

Trade in Tabriz was ruled by a range of external factors: the arrival of trade caravans, festivals, and, for some time, the annual presence of Fath Ali Shah's camp at Ujan, near Soltaniyeh. Tabriz's trading season lasted from September until March 20 (Nowruz). In the run up to Nowruz, goods had their best sales due to the Iranian custom of buying new clothes for themselves, family members, and servants for the New Year.¹³⁵ Furthermore, after Nowruz, it was necessary to arrive in Soltaniyeh in June—a ten-day journey by caravan—because Fath `Ali Shah and his court would be there. However, this annual custom ended with this shah, as his successors opted for other summer locations.¹³⁶ From April to August, there was hardly any trade in Tabriz at all. During this period, of the twenty-five to thirty types of chintzes sold in Tabriz, only muslins of one or two colors turned a profit. There would also be new life injected into the market when the *hajjis* returned from Mecca in July. These were mostly merchants, who bought chintzes and cloth before moving on to their final destination. After they left, the market would be dead for another two months.¹³⁷

Also, very important until around 1832, there were hardly any sales on credit. In fact,

This is the only town in Persia where goods are sold for cash, because there is no barter trade; at Tabriz, on the contrary the principal transactions are by barter. Expensive good such as gold-silver cloth are sold by cash.¹³⁸

However, this changed after 1832. Whereas “formerly sales were to Iranian merchants in Constantinople for cash, but now, gradually, 6 months credit is allowed.”¹³⁹ Ten years later, it was reported that credit periods were granted for eight to twelve months rather than the usual three to seven months.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ MacLean, *Report on the Conditions and Prospects of British Trade in Persia*, 46; Administrative Report for 1873–74, 13; for details, see Floor, *The Importation of Textiles into Qajar Iran*.

¹³⁴ DCR 1440, “Report on the Trade of the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1893–94 by Cecil G. Wood,” 4; see also Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 23–27; Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, vol. 1, 343–44. For the transport rates and trip duration via the various supply routes in 1907, see Doty, “Review of Trade Conditions in Persia,” 630.

¹³⁵ *The Oriental Herald*, 206; Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 139–40; Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 432–33.

¹³⁶ *The Oriental Herald*, 206; Potts, *Agreeable News from Persia: Iran in the Colonial and early Republican American Press, 1712–1848*, 1285–86.

¹³⁷ Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 137–43; Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 432–33; Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 44; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106 (translation of part of Berezin's travel account). I am not sure whether pilgrims always returned to Tabriz in July or, more likely, returned at different times of the year, depending on the timing of the hajj.

¹³⁸ *The Oriental Herald*, 206.

¹³⁹ Government of the United States, “David Porter, US Legation to John Forsyth, Secretary of State. St. Stephano, 25/11/1834 and 06/08/1835,” 53.

¹⁴⁰ Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 137–43; Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 432–33; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106 (translation of part of Berezin's travel account).

In 1825, Armenian merchants were involved in foreign trade, importing broadcloth and silks from the Leipzig Fair.¹⁴¹ There were also at least three British merchants based in Odessa who participated in this trade.¹⁴² This so-called Tiflis trade was controlled by a small number of Tiflis's main merchants ("Armenians, Grusians, Persians"), collectively referred to as Persians in German sources, who collected orders from smaller merchants, bought goods at the Leipzig Eastern Fair, and then shipped them to Tabriz, all on behalf and at the risk of the smaller merchants. In 1835, there were fifteen such merchants, and eleven in 1836.¹⁴³ However, it would seem that these merchants' role became insignificant by 1847, as the Leipzig Fair's "Oriental trade" was reportedly in the hands of Austrian Jewish merchants by that time.¹⁴⁴ The majority of merchants were Caucasian Armenians from Georgia and Qarabagh. Berezin estimated that there were 300–500 Russian subjects in Tabriz, forming the city's largest foreign community. Most of these merchants were small traders.¹⁴⁵ The number of Caucasian Russians subject was much higher than 500; ignoring Russian rules of compulsory registration, they came anyway and by 1850, their total number in Iran was estimated at 2,000 to 2,200.¹⁴⁶

There were also Iranian (Moslem and Armenian) merchants who traveled from Tabriz to Istanbul with silver to buy *indiennes* and cloth. They traded on their own account and for thirty to forty smaller or larger merchants in Tabriz on a commission basis. For them, transportation costs were lower than for Europeans. They never insured the goods, the packing was cheaper, and on arrival they just dumped the goods at the owner's doorstep. They only paid two rials per bale in road duties (*rahdarlik*) at Khoy.¹⁴⁷ These Tabriz wholesale merchants had been opposed to direct trade between Great Britain and Trabzon, because such would hurt their interests in Istanbul. In 1830, Burgess had therefore been forced to sell his goods to the higher class of people, as Tabriz merchants were uninterested in trading with him. However, Iranian merchants outside Tabriz did not have this problem, encouraging Burgess and others to continue direct trade.¹⁴⁸ There also were merchants of the Dilmanli and Lak tribes who packed the goods themselves, made economies wherever they could en route, and sold their goods immediately upon arrival, allegedly at only one percent profit, and then returned to Istanbul to buy more. If they were unable to sell their goods in Tabriz, they moved on to Tehran, Qazvin, Rasht, Isfahan, and other towns. Such merchants were a thorn in the side of Tabrizi merchants, undercutting their plans to control trade with Istanbul.¹⁴⁹ British goods had swept away all competition.

There were also many traveling peddlers, both for commercial purposes and those making pilgrimage to Mecca or Karbala: Iranian Moslems and Armenians, as well as Turkmen from Bokhara and Khiva. To pay for their travel, they would invest in Iranian goods such

¹⁴¹ Bélanger, *Voyage aux Indes-Orientales*, vol. 2, 322, 325. Twenty Armenians and Iranians came from Tiflis to Leipzig in 1829. Weber, *Blicke in die Zeit*, 472.

¹⁴² *The Oriental Herald*, 285–86.

¹⁴³ Nischwitz, *Handels-Geographie und Handelsgeschichte. Zweiter oder Spezieller Teil*, 107; see also Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 80. For further details, see von Hagemester, *Der europäische Handel in der Türkei und in Persien*, 75.

¹⁴⁴ *Deutsche Zeitung* nr. 111. Heidelberg 19 Oktober 1847, 888, Türkei, Smirna 28 Sept. Beilage zur Deutschen Zeitung nr. 111, 19 Oktober 1847, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 73; Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 77, 88, 96–97 (with lists of some of their names and trading figures); Blau 1858, 38. For the business practices and terms of small traders, see Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 135–41.

¹⁴⁶ Blau, *Die kommerzielle Zustände Persiens*, 36.

¹⁴⁷ On road duties, see Floor, *A Fiscal History of Iran in the Safavid and Qajar Period*, 379ff.

¹⁴⁸ Abrahamian, "A Brief Note Respecting the Trade of the Northern Provinces of Persia, Addressed to T.H. Villiers [1832]," 284; Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 127, n. 50. Persian sources give no information about the mercantile community in Tabriz at that time. Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition*, 96.

¹⁴⁹ Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 137. On the Kurdish Lak tribe, see Mohammad Reza [Faribors] Hamzeh'ee, "Lak Tribe," *Encyclopedia Iranica*. The term Dilmanli refers to a Kurdish tribal group who live near Salmas. Both groups likely used the trade route via Khoy.

as arms, lacquer work, *khatam*, shawls, carpets, and silks. They traded while traveling, selling part of their goods in Erzerum or Trabzon, selling most in Istanbul, and selling the remainder in Alexandria and Smyrna. In return, they bought European goods, which they sold while traveling across the country. The total value of their goods amounted to several thousand piasters, but it was the sheer number of these people, rather than the volume of their trade, that was significant. There were also wealthy merchants who regularly traveled to Europe, including Armenians from Tabriz, Erevan, and Tiflis. They mostly exported shawls, pearls, and precious stones and took European goods in return. Most did business in Istanbul but also attended fairs in Vienna, Leipzig, Moscow, and Lyon and Manchester (as of the 1840s) to make purchases. Prior to the development of trade relations between Istanbul and Tabriz, all trade was in hands of Armenians, who still dominated the fabrics, glass, glassware, and haberdashery trades. Trabzon was the main transit place for trade to and from Iran, where all commercial houses in Istanbul and Tabriz had an agent forwarding their goods.¹⁵⁰ In short, there were a few big and many small Iranian merchants, but even the principal merchants of Tabriz did not have capital over 1,500 silver rubles; indeed, there were only five people in Tabriz with that much capital. Thus, credit was the lifeline of Iranian traders: without credit, trade could not function.¹⁵¹

This situation changed in 1837, when European merchants—notably, Ralli and Angelasto—established themselves in Tabriz. This move was likely the result of realizing that having a presence in Tabriz would be more profitable. As Smith and Dwight wrote in 1833:

A mercantile firm that shall extend its branches no farther east than Trebizond or Erzerum, can expect nothing in the Persian trade. For the merchants of that country will never stop at a small magazine in either of those places, so long as a little more time, which they know not how to value, and the distance of a few hundred miles, which it costs them almost nothing to travel, will bring them to the extensive depots of Constantinople, which have so long furnished them with goods to the amount of many hundred thousand tomans annually.¹⁵²

Berezin wrote that Ralli came to Tabriz at a time when many Iranian merchants had overextended themselves, buying too many fabrics on credit for which there was no demand. As a result, many—as well as a few of their suppliers in Istanbul—went bankrupt. Moreover, their reputation had suffered, meaning that their credit rating in Istanbul dropped precipitously, even more so because there had also been intentional bankruptcies. At first, the principal merchants (*binakdaran*) of Tabriz forbade smaller traders from doing business with Ralli.¹⁵³ However, after a few months, the well-capitalized Ralli & Angelasto firm, which was under Russian protection, was able to change this hostility by extending credit to Iranian traders, while everyone else would only do business with Iranians for cash. With help of the Russian consul, Ralli's presence was embraced and trade in British goods in particular, the only ones

¹⁵⁰ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 44–45. Almost all trade in Tabriz was in the hands of Armenians, who went to the fairs in Leipzig, Hamburg, and Nizhni-Novgorod. English, Austrian, and Greek houses in Constantinople had agents in Tabriz. MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics. A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs ... of All Nations*, vol. 2, 637.

¹⁵¹ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 106; Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 55. According to Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 137, there were only three Iranian merchants in Tabriz with capital of 30,000 to 40,000 tumans.

¹⁵² Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 2, 148.

¹⁵³ On these binakdaran and their actions, see Sepsis, “Du Commerce de Tauris,” 140–41.

Ralli had in stock, took off.¹⁵⁴ Thereafter, very few merchants in Tabriz ordered Russian chintzes anymore (see Table 7).¹⁵⁵ British goods had swept away all competition.

In the 1850s, according to Blau, the Ralli firm controlled one-third of the trade in cottons and exported more than half of Gilan's raw silk crop. Other European firms and Russian wholesalers were also engaged in both import and export.¹⁵⁶ Although British imports dominated Tabriz's trade, there were only two British merchants in the city after 1830, Charles Burgess and Richard Bonham, the latter of whom was also a British consul.¹⁵⁷ Richard White Stevens, a former employee of Brandt in Trabzon and successor to Bonham as consul in 1844, promoted British trade in Tabriz through his consular status. To that end, he not only engaged in trade himself, but also accorded British protection to twenty local merchants. Furthermore, and likely imitating Ralli, Stevens arranged for large sums of credit for merchants in Tabriz to facilitate the import of British cottons.¹⁵⁸ Foreign consuls in Tabriz not only promoted their countries' trade, but also extended their political influence to protect "their" merchants, sometimes even in cases of fraudulent behavior. For example, Georgian Armenians made much money through and were indeed well protected by the Russian consul in Tabriz. When one complained that an Iranian debtor was trying to defraud him, the consul immediately ordered the latter's property sequestered,

without referring at all to the Persian authorities. A "kavass," or messenger, was immediately sent to the debtor's shop, the door was closed, the Russian seal put upon it, which even the Ameer, or Governor of Tabreez himself could not pull down; the claims of the Russian subject were then seized for, and the other creditors might help themselves to any thing that remained.¹⁵⁹

In reality, it was less easy to be reimbursed for one's losses, as cases of conflicts between foreigners and Iranians had to be heard by a special mixed court.¹⁶⁰

The increase in Tabriz's foreign trade was also evident from the growth in the number and importance of European commercial firms in Istanbul with agents in Tabriz. The same held for Moslem and Armenian merchants in Tabriz with agents in Istanbul, indicating that much of the trade with Europe was indirect in most cases.¹⁶¹ In the 1840s in Istanbul,

¹⁵⁴ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, 106. Such market crashes were part of the normal business cycle. It would seem that Iranian merchants had not learnt from their mistake in 1836, for the same event was repeated in 1843, when a drop in prices in Great Britain led to the increased import of cheap goods into Tabriz, leading to a glut in the market. The result was that many traders in Tabriz went bankrupt. Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 134-35. A similar event took place in 1870. "Bankruptcies were numerous past year among native traders. European houses lost £40,000 in addition to losses in Istanbul from the frequent frauds and failures by Iranian merchants established there, whose credit has now fallen to the lowest point." AP, "Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1870," 241.

¹⁵⁵ This was the case in Tabriz, but there still was some sale of Russian goods in Astarabad, although few details on the type of textiles are available. Ataev, *Togrovo*, 121-22. E.g., kazimirs (twilled cloth), chintzes, and flannels were still sold in Astarabad, but it was a dwindling business, as most fabrics also came from Tabriz in the 1840s. Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 152-53, 159, 226.

¹⁵⁶ Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 56-57; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, 23; Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 77, 88, 96-97; Blau 1858, 38.

¹⁵⁷ Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, 96-98; Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 57. Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 147-48 ("The Tabriz trade was in the hands of natives; there were no European houses").

¹⁵⁸ Hommaire de Hell, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse*, vol. 2, 70; Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, 98.

¹⁵⁹ Fowler, *Three Years in Persia*, vol. 2, 233-34; Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 58-59. For complaints about debt dodging by sayyeds, see Kukanova, *Russko-Iranskaya Torgovlya 30-50e gody XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov*, 30-41. On consular court procedure, see Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 55-57. For the politics of trade and consular protection, see Lambton, *Qajar Persia*, 119-28.

¹⁶⁰ On this subject, see Morteza Nouraei, "Kargozar," *Encyclopedia Iranica*; Floor, "Hotz versus Muhammad Shafi": a case study in commercial litigation in Qajar Iran."

¹⁶¹ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 43.

Table 8: Imports into Tabriz by origin 1833–41 (in assignation rubles)¹⁶²

Year	Russian From Constantinople	Subjects From Russia	Russian Subjects From Leipzig and France	Iranians From Constantinople	Iranians From Russia	Foreigners From Constantinople	Foreigners From Britain and other places	Total
1833	263	1,088	432	13,040	n.a.	n.a.	523	15,347
1834	21	1,506	478	14,976	176	n.a.	780	17,938
1835	39	60`	2,125	28,286	86	n.a.	1,812	32,954
1836	19	905	2,960	33,488	n.a.	n.a.	2,718	40,090
1837	1,736	1,038	4,313	2,000	730	688	2,352	12,856
1838	1,423	235	3,838	6,720	270	789	1,464	14,739
1839	933	196	1,067	4,500	n.a.	243	467	7,407
1840	951	404	783	3,360	n.a.	960	n.a.	6,458
1841	636	130	5,979	3,500	n.a.	960	560	11,035

¹⁶² Source: Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800–1914*, 108; Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, 278–79.

the following European firms were trading with Iran: T. Ralli and Comp.; G. Stefanovich, Ionides and Comp.; E. Manuelovich and Radocanachi; Ralli and Mavrojani; C. Novico; N. Negroponti; P. Mavrocordato; and Fill. Jenidunia. Of these, the first three had direct contacts with Iran and branch offices in Tabriz, while the others only engaged in indirect trade by warehousing the goods bought by traveling merchants going to Iran and beyond. In Trabzon, the major transport companies were: T. Gerst; Charnaud Marcopoly and Comp; Calimachi; Hafez Agha; Sayyed Morteza; and Rahim Agha. In Erzerum, the major transporters included: F. Garibaldi; R. W. Calvert; Haji Hoseyn; Haji Ali Rahim; and Molla Hasan. In Tabriz, under Russian protection, there were: the Greek firms Ralli and Angelasto, a branch of T. Ralli in Istanbul; Stravachi Calduvachi and Comp., a branch of G. Stefanovich; and L. C. Sgutta and Comp., a branch of Ionides and Comp. There also was one Austrian firm: F. A. Gelalenz. The most important Russian subjects from Armenia and Georgia involved in the Tabriz trade were: Gabaret Shancusadoff, Agob Hadschiadanckoff, Marduros Hancuoff, Th. Masuneoff, and G. Gulioff. Armenians merchants from Erzerum included: Artin Hadschiadunian, Kasar Artin, and Gabaret. Iranian wholesalers who traded directly with Istanbul included: Hajj Mir Mohammad Hoseyn, Hajj Sayyed Hoseyn, and Hajj Rasul Damad. In Tehran, Russian Armenian merchants trading with Tabriz were: G. Manikonoff; Gabarat Sarafoglu; and A. Kusinoff. There was also one Austrian merchant, A. Töpfner, who was under Russian protection. While these were the most important merchants, there were also many smaller Iranian merchants who bought goods from Tabriz.¹⁶³ In 1859, there was one French, one Swiss, and five Greek commercial firms; of the latter, one was under British protection, two under Russian, and two under Turkish. They almost exclusively imported British manufactures from Manchester and exported raw silk.¹⁶⁴ In 1863, of the three Greek firms under British protection, only two remained.¹⁶⁵ Three years later, of the two Greek firms, only one remained; but in 1871, there were three Greek firms active in Tabriz again.¹⁶⁶

The Ralli firm grew in size and importance over the years, such that Abbott reported in 1865: “there are no very wealthy native participating in it [trade] and none can pretend to compete with the great Foreign House [Ralli].” Due to Ralli’s position, it could ruin any Iranian trader. Indeed, after Ralli warned Iranian merchants not to engage in the textile trade, and they refused, he sold cottons below market price, at a loss, and ruined many of them. As a result, the bazaar closed down, meetings were held at the homes of merchants and religious leaders, and an appeal was made against Ralli to the governor. The local merchant community had enough clout to stop Ralli from recovering certain sums (notably from Nazem al-Tojjar) and force it to take back goods the firm had just sold on April 18, 1864.¹⁶⁷ This spot of trouble may have had a temporary impact on Ralli’s expansion plans, for in 1865, Iranian merchants imported some forty percent and European merchants some sixty percent of textiles into Tabriz.¹⁶⁸ By 1870, however, the textile trade was almost completely monopolized by three Greek firms.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 47–48. For some of these Iranian merchants in Tabriz, see Adib al-Molk, *Dafe` al-Ghorur*, 175, 191–95, 202, 261, 282.

¹⁶⁴ AP 30/63 (1861), 61; Blau, *Die kommerzielle Zustände Persiens*, 38; Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, 98–99. The Swiss merchants were Messrs. Würth and Fiedinger, who, in 1865, had already been in Tabriz for many years. They were engaged in the import-export trade and had an office in the Amir caravanseraï. Lycklama also mentioned two other Swiss (Meili and Bauman), but does not mention their occupation. Lycklama 1873, vol. 2, 41. They may have been independent merchants, or representatives of the Swiss firm Dinner, Hanhart & Co. Brugsch, *Die Reise der K.K. Gesandtschaft nach Persien 1861–1862*, vol. 1, 176.

¹⁶⁵ AP 30-31/61 (1863), 201.

¹⁶⁶ AP 32/70 (1866), 476; AP 65 (1871), 238.

¹⁶⁷ NA, FO 60/292, Abbott to Russell (Tabriz, 22/02/1865), not foliated. Although things settled down, there were again problems in May 1864, but the matter was more or less “resolved” in August 1864. However, the ill-feeling persisted, in particular among a group called Tehranichis, as they had direct contact with Tehran. NA, FO 60/292, Abbott to Alison (28/04/1865). For those interested in this conflict there are more details available in other letters in this same FO 60/292 volume.

¹⁶⁸ AP 54-55 (1865) Tabreez, 268; Brugsch, *Die Reise der K.K. Gesandtschaft nach Persien 1861–1862*, vol. 1, 176 (Greek firms and a Swiss firm imported most of the European goods).

¹⁶⁹ AP 65 (1871) Tabreez, 238.

In 1865, there were some eighty small traders, all Russian subjects from the Caucasus, residing in Tabriz, but not a single “considerable merchant of Russia in this or any part of Persia,” which greatly impeded an increase in Russian trade.¹⁷⁰ Russian traders were “Georgians, Armenians, and the natives of Bakou and Dagestan who are seldom Stationary in any part of the Coast.”¹⁷¹ In 1870, five Russian firms operated in Tabriz trading directly with Great Britain, France, Austria, and Turkey.¹⁷² However, it is unclear whether they were newcomers or belonged to the group of small traders mentioned earlier. It is noteworthy that, in the 1860s, there were also no British merchants in Tabriz, although there were European merchants and an effective sales network that worked as a substitute.¹⁷³ In the 1880s, the Manchester firm of Ziegler—under British protection—set up looms in Tabriz and elsewhere in Iran (notably in Soltananad/Arak), which marked the rebirth of the carpet trade.¹⁷⁴ At that time, there were about nine major Iranian merchants and five foreign ones active in Tabriz.¹⁷⁵

The above-mentioned Greek and Iranian firms dealt almost exclusively in cottons. Armenians and Austrians, on the other hand, mainly dealt in cloths, silk and woolen shawl stuffs, glassware, hardware, and fashion accessories. In Istanbul, past sales had only been settled with cash, but now credit was increasingly used.¹⁷⁶

These cotton goods are not often sold for cash by the native merchants, but generally exchanged for Resht products, such as frisons [raw silk refuse or *las*] and rice. The Tabreez merchants who deal in this manner send the silk to Tabreez, where native factories exist, the frisons [refuse raw silk] to Constantinople, and the rice to Tabreez for local consumption.¹⁷⁷

The wool trade in Tabriz was carried on by some Armenians, likely Iranian subjects, as MacLean reported in 1903 that the wool trade was in the hands of Iranian merchants.¹⁷⁸

The description of how trade between Trabzon and Tabriz was organized in 1892 also reflects how the same trade was carried on in the preceding decades.¹⁷⁹

Most of the importers of Tabreez have correspondents residing at Constantinople, who look after the purchase and transmission of European merchandise for them.

The goods are sent direct to a commission agent at Trebizond. On arrival of the consignment at that place it is opened by the custom-house officials, who, after verification of the contents, deliver of ‘teskeré’ indicating their nature and value.

¹⁷⁰ AP 30-31/61 (1863), 201; AP 68 (1866) Tabreez, 63.

¹⁷¹ DCR 445, “Report for the Year 1887–88 on the Trade of Tabreez by W.G. Abbott,” 1; Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, 72, 104.

¹⁷² Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Great Britain in Persia, 1864-1914. A Study in Imperialism*, 169.

¹⁷³ On the lack of British merchants, see AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Abbott on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1865,” 476.

¹⁷⁴ Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, 99–100. In the 1880s–90s, the Amir-e Nezam or Amir caravansaray was occupied by Messrs. Ziegler & Co., the Imperial Bank, and other European and Armenian merchants. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, 61.

¹⁷⁵ E’temad al-Saltaneh, *Montazam-e Naseri*, vol. 1, 565–66 (Hajji Mir Mohammad Hoseyn nazem al-Tojjar Esfahani, Haji Mohammad Ebrahim Qazvini, Hajji Mohammad Sadeq Komsa’i, Hajji Kazem Malek al-Tojjar, Hajji Ali Akbar Tokhmeh-forush, Hajji Mohammad Hasan tajer-e Esfahani, Hajji Rahim Tupchi, and Hajji `Abdol-Malek Kho’i. The major foreign merchants were: Ralli, Savajoghlu and Chelebi, Greek merchants, and Tomaschi [?] and Qaguziyan, a Swiss and Armenian from Istanbul respectively).

¹⁷⁶ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 48–49.

¹⁷⁷ DCR 1564, “Report on the Trade and Commerce of Province of Ghilan for the Year 1893–94 and of the Province of Asterabad for the Year 1892–93,” 6.

¹⁷⁸ AP, “Report by Mr. Consul-General Jones on the Trade and Commerce of Tabreez for the Year 1870,” 238; MacLean, *Report on the Conditions and Prospects of British Trade in Persia*, 46.

¹⁷⁹ See, e.g., Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 45–46, 49–50.

The commission agent then gives a guarantee that the said goods are destined for Persia, and engages at the same time to produce proof, after a reasonable delay, of their having passed over the Turkish frontier, for, on the non-production of such evidence, the goods are considered as having remained and been sold in contraband in Turkey, and in this case the commission agent is called upon to pay a double duty, amounting to 16 per cent.

The goods are then sealed and forwarded to Erzeroum, where the seals are examined and certificates given according to the exigencies of the case. Caravan drivers then take possession of them, accompanied by lusters.

In practice, of course, matters do not proceed so smoothly as the above would make it appear, for, during mid-winter, snows and storms interfere with the transport traffic, and merchandise often accumulates at such a rate at the Trebizond custom-house that on the re-opening of the roads, or rather tracks, it often happens that there are not sufficient beasts of burden for the purposes required of them, whence delay, much increased cost of transport, and consequent losses are entailed upon importers beyond the usual deficiencies by robbery or the negligence of the drivers.¹⁸⁰

Because of economic depression and political oppression in the 1890s,

Many native merchants of some standing, owing to [political and economic problems] and other circumstances, have retired either to Russia or Kerbela, and one of the foremost British firms, for many years importers of Bradford goods, have dropped importation, and have taken, to their greater profit and general comfort, to the banking business with branches in Persia and abroad.¹⁸¹

Business would look up again after 1900. Although Russia at that time, not Great Britain, dominated trade in Tabriz, there were still two foreign firms active in the city, specializing in the export of rugs. Moreover, around 1907, a German and Austrian firm began trading in Tabriz, thus indicating that commercial benefits also existed for non-Russian businesses.¹⁸² The list of foreign and Iranian firms active in Tabriz in 1910 shows that this was not a fluke; Tabriz was still an important commercial hub.¹⁸³ Trade with Iran was also very important for Erzerum and Trabzon, of course. In 1898, Lynch reported that, according to the Persian consul, 30,000–40,000 camels came to Erzerum per year, and their owners spent some £81,000 per year on provisions and sundries in Erzerum.¹⁸⁴ A decade later, however, the situation had changed for the worse. In the first quarter of 1910, Trabzon only received 3,674 pieces of cargo for Iran, 3,175 of which were from abroad. From Iran arrived a mere 200 bales of carpets, indicating that trade via this route had dropped significantly, almost coming to a standstill. This appears to have been due mainly to the bad financial situation of Iranian merchants, who had been unable to pay off their debts and thus could not get credit. This situation was peculiar to Tabriz, because Iran's overall foreign trade had continued to grow.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ DCR 1440, "Report on the Trade of the Province of Azerbaijan for the Year 1893–94 by Cecil G. Wood," 6; see also Sepsis, "Du Commerce de Tauris," 135–41.

¹⁸¹ DCR 2291, "Report on the Trade and Commerce of Azerbaijan for the Year 1898–99 by Cecil G. Wood," 10.

¹⁸² Government of the United States, "Market Openings, Persia and Asia Minor," 36. There was also a British firm active in the import-export trade, viz. Hild. F. Stevens and Son. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians*, 100.

¹⁸³ Küss, *Handelsratgeber für Persien*, part 3, 48–49 lists foreign and native merchants. In 1911, Iranian merchants in Trabzon imported 12,246 cases "of the most varied character and 9,465 cases were imported by some 29 firms of British, American, Austro-Hungarian, German, Greek, and Jewish nationalities." DCR 5014, "Acting Consul Alvarez, Report on the Trade and Commerce of the Vilayet of Trebizond for the year 1910–11," 7.

¹⁸⁴ Lynch, *Armenia, Travels and Study*, vol. 2, 207. Part of the sundries, in the case of Trabzon, were sacks and bagging imported from Great Britain and India, partly for the Persian transit trade. United States 1909, 46.

¹⁸⁵ Anonymous, "Trapezunts Transithandel mit Persien," 365.

From Backwater to Major Hub

Along with the growth in trade, the city of Tabriz and its population also grew. In 1800, Tabriz had a population of some 40,000, but by 1848, it had 150,000 inhabitants, 18 large and several small caravanserais, and many well-supplied bazaars, mostly newly built. Gödel called it “Persia’s most important trading center.”¹⁸⁶ However, other sources estimated the number of inhabitants in 1850 at 100,000, and it is only in 1890 that 170,000 to 200,000 inhabitants is listed.¹⁸⁷ The population in 1848 may indeed have been overestimated, as British Consul Abbott estimated the population to be 150,000 in 1864: in size it was “probably more superior to Isfahan” and “considerably larger than Tehran.” At that time, both the city and its trade had increased considerably since 1830. In fact, trade with Europe was estimated to have increased eight-fold.¹⁸⁸ Although the city had grown in size, it still displayed the features developed sixty years prior. Tabriz was still a walled city with a circumference of about 3.5 miles with extensive suburbs. By the 1860s, its walls and moat were dilapidated and full of breaches.¹⁸⁹ Its bazaars were extensive and well-supplied but meanly constructed. There were 3,100 shops of all kinds, 309 caravanserais for merchants and traders, and 40 others for muleteers. The city was the commercial center of Iran and “the mart from which nearly all the Northern and Midland Countries are supplied” with European goods, mainly by land from the Black Sea. In the 1860s, these imports via Trabzon were estimated at £1,750,000 per year via 87,000 packages of half-mule loads, 75 percent of which were British goods.¹⁹⁰ In 1888, the city was said to have about 200,000 inhabitants, of which no more than 4,000 Georgian Armenians.¹⁹¹

Even though after 1870 Tabriz lost its place as the foremost entrepôt of Iran, the city was not diminished in size, population, or commercial importance. In 1895, its population was estimated at about 200,000 and it was once again considered Iran’s most important commercial center.¹⁹² However, due to the revolution of 1906 and the uprising of 1908, Tabriz’s trade was greatly depressed. Many of its shops and houses were plundered and burnt; trade was at standstill for many months. Losses were estimated at \$8,000,000. Many merchants lost much money and credit was not good.¹⁹³ Russian trade mainly came via Jolfa, and less so via Astara, while all non-Russian goods were brought via the Trabzon route, which remained the main trade artery of Tabriz for as long transit of such goods through Russia was banned.¹⁹⁴ In fact, in 1907, according to American Consul Jewett in Trabzon, “About 30 per cent of the commerce of Trebizond is credited to the imports and exports of

¹⁸⁶ Gödel, *Ueber den Pontischen Handelsweg und die Verhältnisse des europäisch-persischen Verkehrs*, 30. In 1830, British officers in Tabriz estimated its population at 60,000. Smith, *Researches of the Rev. E. Smith & Rev. H. G. O. Dwight in Armenia including a journey through Asia Minor, & into Georgia & Persia*, vol. 1, 144.

¹⁸⁷ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*, 27; Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 66 (less than 100,000 in 1842).

¹⁸⁸ Amanat, *Cities & Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran 1847-1866*, 223. However, von Thielmann estimated the population at only 100,000 in 1872. von Thielmann, *Streifzuege im Kaukasus, in Persien und in der Asiatischen Tuerkei*, 288.

¹⁸⁹ See, e.g. Bérézine, *Voyage au Daghestan et en Transcaucasie*, vol. 2, 46, 49.

¹⁹⁰ Amanat, *Cities & Trade: Consul Abbott on the Economy and Society of Iran 1847-1866*, 216, 218, 223 (In 1859, “the telegraph was established between Tehran and Tabriz, but badly constructed so often out of service.”) In 1861, the British consul reported that Tabriz “has 32 caravanserais for merchants, containing 1,189 counting-houses and a proportionate number of store-rooms. In addition, there are 37 caravanserais for accommodation of muleteers and their animals.” AP 63 (1861), 61. In 1860, the customs farm yielded 200,000 tumans. Brugsch, *Die Reise der K.K. Gesandtschaft nach Persien 1861-1862*, vol. 1, 176.

¹⁹¹ DCR 423, “Report on the Agricultural Resources of the Province of Azerbaijan, District of Tabreez by Abbott,” 2.

¹⁹² Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad via Tiflis, Tabriz and Persian Kurdistan*, 98.

¹⁹³ Government of the United States, “Market Openings. Persia and Asia Minor,” 36.

¹⁹⁴ For 101 exceptions to this rule in case of their import via Batum, see Küss, *Handelsratgeber für Persien*, part 1, 479-82. For the declining share of Iranian transit trade in Trabzon, see Issawi, “The Tabriz-Trabzon Trade,” 25-36, Table 1.

Table 9: Import and Export by Major Customhouses (1920/21–1923/24) in *qrans*¹⁹⁵

Customs house	Imports 1920/21	Exports 1920/21	Imports 1923/24	Exports 1923/24
Kermanshah	145,625,040	33,201,315	194,338,059	61,483,413
Bushehr	98,043,706	32,314,481	277,660,769	505,193,516
Sistan	29,411,393	3,088,563	58,355,674	26,056,956
Tabriz	3,345,248	11,247,355	46,691,768	39,372,960
Caspian ports	6,582,180*	1,186,578*	57,574,989	58,588,879
Parcel post	2,301,188	2,717,149	5,091,725	5,411,253
Total	482,000,000	138,000,000	672,164,675	739,758,253

*no data from Resht due to revolutionary activities.

Persia.”¹⁹⁶ Although Tehran had become the center of financial transactions and the money market, Tabriz still remained the real commercial center of Iran in 1910,¹⁹⁷ but not for long. After WWI this role was taken over by Kermanshah, and later by Bushehr (see Table 9).¹⁹⁸

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¹⁹⁵ Source: Temple 1922, 10; Hadow 1925, 47.

¹⁹⁶ Government of the United States, “Market Openings. Persia and Asia Minor,” 48.

¹⁹⁷ Küss, *Handelsratgeber für Persien*, part 3, 47.

¹⁹⁸ Floor, *Kermanshah: City, Society and Trade*, 260.

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