

The Effects of the Organization of the Baku Customs House on Trade

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Abstract: *This article examines the impact of the establishment of the Baku Customs Office, organized in accordance with the Russian customs system by Tsarist Russia in the territory of Northern Azerbaijan, on trade. The paper notes that the Russian Empire paid particular attention to customs duties and the creation of customs offices even during the course of the occupation. The research demonstrates that Tsarist Russia pursued its colonial policy in the strictest possible manner in order to secure the financial interests of the imperial treasury.*

The article sets out to answer three main questions. First, it aims to clarify the problems that arose during the establishment of the customs office in Baku. Second, it seeks to identify the reasons why Russia chose Baku as the location for its first customs office in Northern Azerbaijan. Third, it attempts to determine the impact of the commencement of the customs administration's operations in Baku on trade. The research methodology employed in this study primarily relies on historical-analytical and comparative analysis approaches. The main sources include documents from the State Historical Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire, the Acts of the Caucasian Archaeological Commission, academic publications, and scholarly articles.

Keywords: *customs duties, Tsarist Russia, trade, Baku Customs Office, Russo-Persian War, Northern Azerbaijan.*

Introduction

Tsarist Russia, within the framework of its economic interests, began to make decisions on the establishment of customs structures in the Azerbaijani territories from the first years of its occupation. The adoption of such decisions during a period of ongoing warfare required careful consideration and was sometimes possible only after protracted discussions. By the decree of Tsar Alexander I dated 12 September 1801, a small portion of historical Azerbaijani lands was annexed to the Russian Empire. Beginning in 1803, Russia proceeded

to occupy Azerbaijani territories by force of arms: in 1803, the Jar region was occupied, and at the beginning of 1804, Ganja fell under Russian control. In May 1805, the khanates of Karabakh and Shaki were compelled to sign the Kurekchay Treaty, thereby accepting Russian suzerainty¹. The Tsarist administration wasted no time in implementing its economic policies in the occupied Azerbaijani lands, initiating economic exploitation by imposing taxes and various obligations. It is no coincidence that from the early years of the occupation, the customs system, as an essential component of the economy, began to be

reorganized in line with Russian interests, and the Tsarist government introduced its own customs policy in the region. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Russia's customs policy was shaped under the influence of both political and economic factors². The establishment of the first customs post in Azerbaijani territories was initially planned for the Shamshadil region. Following the occupation and abolition of the Ganja Khanate, a proposal was also put forward to open a customs post there. After the Karabakh and Shaki khanates were brought under Russian suzerainty, Rumyantsev, in correspondence dated 3 July 1805, addressed Sisianov enquiring about the feasibility of establishing customs offices within the territories of these khanates³. However, since these khanates retained their internal autonomy, the establishment of customs institutions within their territories was not yet possible. Sisianov indicated that the area of Javad, located at the confluence of the Kura and Araz rivers and not yet occupied by Russia, was a suitable site for the establishment of a customs office. This demonstrates that Tsarist officials were already contemplating and discussing the creation of customs structures even in territories that had not yet been annexed. In 1806, following the occupation of the Baku Khanate by Russia, the khanate's traditional administrative system was abolished and replaced with a commandant governance system⁴. Baku was chosen as the site for the establishment of the first customs office.

On 25 January 1807, a decree was issued for the creation of a customs office in the city of Baku⁵. However, it was not possible to implement this decree immediately. One of the major issues under discussion prior to the commencement of the customs office's operations concerned the collection of duties.

Establishment of the Baku Customs House

Only a month after the occupation and abolition of the Baku Khanate by Russia, the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian forces, I.V. Gudovich, on 23 November 1806, addressed Count Rumyantsev, the Russian Minister of Commerce, regarding the necessity of establishing a customs administration in Baku. In turn, Rumyantsev submitted this matter to the Emperor for consideration⁶. On 25 January 1807, the Senate of the Russian Empire drafted a decree on the establishment of the Baku Customs Office and approved its staffing schedule and charter⁷. According to the Senate's decision, the Baku Customs House was to operate on the basis of a special set of instructions. For a certain period, customs duties were to be collected in accordance with the Astrakhan Tariff published in 1757. With minor modifications, this instruction remained in force until nearly the middle of the nineteenth century⁸. This decree can be regarded as the first concrete step towards laying the foundation of the Russian customs system in Baku and across Northern

Azerbaijan⁹. However, although a decree on the establishment of the customs office had been issued, its actual opening did not take place until two and a half years later. When discussing the reasons for the delayed opening of the Baku Customs Office, H. Hasanov notes that “the war between Russia and the Qajar Empire from 1804 to 1813 delayed the practical implementation of this plan for some time; consequently, on 6 August 1809, the Senate prepared an additional special decree ‘On the Opening of the Baku customs house,’ which was submitted to the Tsar for approval.”¹⁰ On the other hand, given that a significant portion of the Azerbaijani territories still retained their independent khanate governance structures, the extent to which the opening of a customs office in Baku would benefit Russia’s foreign trade remained uncertain.

Another reason for the delay in the official opening of the Baku Customs was a lack of qualified personnel. The task of opening the customs in Baku and appointing officials there was entrusted by the Minister of Trade Rumyantsev, who supervised the execution of the decree, to the director of the Astrakhan Customs S.S. Ivanov¹¹. Although the Senate had stipulated a staff of 55 for the Baku Customs Office, Ivanov sent only “up to 15 officials and lower-ranking employees, along with all the necessary documents” to Baku. He himself was compelled to remain in Astrakhan due to an outbreak of plague and an ongoing investigation

concerning confiscated Asian goods transported by a state vessel. Taking this into account, Rumyantsev appealed to I.V. Gudovich, the Chief Administrator of Georgia, requesting that he find another suitable candidate to oversee the opening of the Baku Customs Office. However, this request could not be fulfilled due to “difficulties in finding trustworthy officials with knowledge of Asian languages”¹². The customs officers who arrived in Baku from Astrakhan began to receive their salaries as of June 1807, funded by the modest revenues generated from customs duties. Due to the “failure to open the customs office,” customs collection for goods brought into Baku between 1807 and 1809 was temporarily carried out in accordance with the existing khanate regulations, which prescribed relatively low duties. In search of a solution to this situation, Gudovich, in November 1807, proposed the temporary introduction of a preferential tariff in Baku and even suggested that Baku be declared a *Porto-Franco* city for a period of 10 or 20 years¹³. (*Porto-Franco* — *porto franco*, *port franc*, or *Freihafen* — refers to a coastal port granted the right to duty-free export of local goods and duty-free import of foreign goods¹⁴.) It was argued that such a status would hold significant future economic benefits for the region. **However, the Minister of Commerce stated that declaring Baku a *Porto-Franco* city would not be beneficial for the imperial treasury.** As a result, taking into account that the

Empire would be deprived of the anticipated customs revenues, it decided against granting Baku the status of a *Porto-Franco*. The delay in the opening of the customs office in Baku, the persistent uncertainty surrounding the process, and the potential loss of customs duties caused considerable concern among Tsarist officials. The Tsarist government, facing difficulties in finding a trustworthy and experienced official familiar with Asian trade to oversee the establishment of the customs house in Baku, was compelled to wait for the plague outbreak in Astrakhan to subside. After the epidemic ended, Ivanov applied for leave to travel to St. Petersburg; however, instead, on 16 February 1809, he was ordered "to depart immediately for Baku and open the customs office there." In his report on the decree signed by Deputy Foreign Minister A.N. Saltykov, Ivanov stated that he would proceed with its implementation without delay. Nonetheless, he fulfilled this obligation only six months later¹⁵. After temporarily handing over his responsibilities at the Astrakhan Customs Office, Ivanov began his journey. Instead of choosing the sea route, which was easier, safer, and faster, he opted for the more difficult and perilous overland route through the Caucasus Mountains. His primary objective in doing so was to gain a closer understanding of the state of customs affairs in Transcaucasia and to identify suitable locations for the establishment of customs posts. Finally, on 6 August 1809, a decree was issued on the opening of

the Baku Customs House. The organizational committee responsible for establishing the Baku Customs Office was headed by N.S. Ivanov, Director of the Astrakhan Port Customs Office; A.P. Tormasov, Commander of Russian troops in the Caucasus; and N.P. Rumyantsev, Minister of Commerce. Merchants from Tehran, Isfahan, Kashan, Kerman, Shiraz, Tabriz, Anzali, and Mazandaran were invited to attend the opening ceremony¹⁶. The opening coincided with the Christian feast day of the Transfiguration (Preobrazhenie). Religious rituals were performed prior to the official inauguration. The opening ceremony itself took place at 10 p.m. at the palace of the Baku merchant Qasim Bey¹⁷, with speeches delivered by Ivanov, Rumyantsev, and Tormasov¹⁸. It is noteworthy that celebrations marking the opening of an independent customs administration in Baku lasted from 6 to 8 August 1809. The Baku Customs Office was subordinate to the Astrakhan Customs District¹⁹. By September 1809, the Baku Customs Office was officially designated the "Baku Port and Border Customs Office."

Reasons for Establishing Russia's First Customs Office in Northern Azerbaijan in Baku.

One key issue that warrants special attention is the question of why Russia chose to establish its first customs office in Northern Azerbaijan, specifically in Baku. This decision by Tsarist Russia was not accidental.

Firstly, it was closely connected with the situation arising from the occupation of the Azerbaijani khanates and the ongoing war with the Qajar state. Under wartime conditions, overland trade routes had become dangerous, costly, and difficult to navigate. In this context, Baku — with its well-situated port — was regarded by the Russian authorities as “the most advantageous location for attracting Iranian trade and revitalizing the domestic industries of Georgia, Shirvan, and Dagestan”. It is no coincidence that after occupying Baku, the Russian administration began developing the area to support customs operations. Interestingly, one of the first projects implemented using customs revenue after the official opening ceremony in August 1809 was the construction of a maritime pier — a port facility — in front of the customs building to ensure the safe and convenient docking of merchant vessels. The construction of the port also aimed to curb smuggling activities²⁰.

However, the construction of the customs pier and the oversight exercised by the customs authorities did not fully resolve the problem of smuggling in Baku. On the other hand, since the Shaki, Karabakh, and Shirvan khanates, which had been brought under Russian suzerainty through treaty, retained their internal autonomy and were frequently turned into battlefields due to the ongoing war with the Qajar state, it was not feasible to establish customs offices either within these khanates or in the

Yelizavetpol district. Moreover, following the occupation of Derbent, Baku, and Quba in 1806, and until the occupation of the Lankaran Khanate during the First Russo-Qajar War, almost all military engagements took place in the western territories of Azerbaijan, far from Baku. Consequently, this situation enabled Russia to consolidate its administrative control in Baku and to establish a customs office there.

Following the occupation of Baku, Gudovich wrote in an official letter to Foreign Minister A. Budberg dated 22 October 1806 that “although the khanate consists of small rural settlements, at first estimate it could yield more than 100 000 rubles to the imperial treasury. It is even possible that it could generate an incomparably greater revenue, since it possesses the best port on the Caspian Sea”²¹. It is noted that in 1807, revenue from oil sales and duties collected on transported goods in Baku amounted to 116 000 silver rubles²². Until the opening of the Baku Customs Office, customs duties were collected by an entity under the direct administration of the State Commercial Collegium. The second reason for establishing the first customs office in Baku was its strategic location at the crossroads of major trade routes. From Baku, caravan routes extended to almost all Azerbaijani khanates. One important trade route ran from Baku to Quba, then to Derbent, Kizlyar, and Astrakhan. Unlike the maritime route, this overland route along the Caspian coast was profitable year-round, mak-

ing it highly convenient for merchants. The city of Kizlyar, located along this route, played a vital role in Russia's transit trade with Iran and the Caucasus, especially with Azerbaijan. Russia's border customs service and the commandant's administration were stationed there²³.

The third reason was related to Baku's role as a major commercial center. Owing to its favorable geographical location on the Caspian Sea coast and its possession of the most convenient and secure port in the region, the city emerged as an important trading hub and a point of transit at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries²⁴. It played a significant role in expanding trade relations between the interior regions of Russia and Iran. As is well known, in the early nineteenth century Baku was already a center of oil and salt production. Oil and saffron from Baku were exported to various parts of Iran, salt was sent to the Anzali province, and by overland routes, salt was transported to various parts of Azerbaijan, including the khanates of Quba, Derbent, Shirvan, Shaki, Lankaran, Karabakh, and Salyan, while cotton fabrics were shipped to the Astrakhan port. As one of Azerbaijan's key commercial centers, Baku also played an important role in transit trade. Merchants from various regions of Azerbaijan, including Derbent, Quba, Shamakhi, Shaki, Ganja, and Shusha, as well as traders from Tiflis, Erivan, and even various cities of the Qajar state and India, came to Baku for commercial purposes. Large volumes

of diverse goods were brought to Baku either for sale or for onwards export to Russia and other countries. A portion of the goods imported into Baku was subsequently transported to Ottoman territories. Moreover, from Bandar Abbas and Muscat, various Indian goods were brought on British ships to the central Iranian city of Shiraz, and from there, via Anzali and Mazandaran, they were shipped to Baku on either Iranian or Russian sailing ships. From Baku, these goods were distributed to other parts of the country, as well as to Georgia, the North Caucasus, and Russia.

The Impact of the Customs House's Operation on Trade in Baku.

Following the opening of the customs administration, trade in Baku declined considerably. For example, while in 1806 the value of goods exported from Baku to Iran alone amounted to 600 000 rubles²⁵, by 1810 the total turnover of the Baku port had fallen to 500 000 rubles. There were several significant reasons for this decline.

Firstly, the Russian government ordered the collection of customs duties in gold and silver **coinage** in Baku, as in Astrakhan. Specifically, the Director of the Astrakhan Customs Office, Ivanov, was instructed to ensure that customs duties in Baku were to be collected in gold and silver coins, following the same practice as in Astrakhan. However, not only was the import of Russian gold and silver

currency into Baku prohibited, but even the circulation of copper coinage was restricted²⁶. In his memorandum to Count Rumyantsev dated 23 January 1810, Tormasov emphasized the necessity of facilitating trade for the benefit of the treasury. He argued that the collection of duties should be permitted in Dutch chervonets, which were not banned from being brought into Baku from Russia, as well as in *khan abbasis* (twenty kopecks) and copper khan coins, which were minted within the khanates under Russian authority and were in wider circulation in Baku. He noted that this would not harm state revenues. Tormasov, having realistically analyzed the prevailing conditions, concluded that if the Astrakhan Customs Office insisted on restricting the collection of duties in Baku to gold and silver coins, which were prohibited from being transported from Astrakhan and other parts of Russia to Baku, this would lead to a decline in trade with Iran and, consequently, a reduction in treasury income²⁷. Thus, Tormasov demonstrated that collecting customs duties in Baku not only in gold and silver but also in *khan abbasis* and copper khan coins, and thereby simplifying trade, aligned with the fiscal interests of the treasury. Undoubtedly, such an arrangement could have made customs revenues a significant component of state income.

As can be seen, prior to the opening of the customs office, Baku's trade primarily relied on the circulation of khan coins, and merchants paid taxes in this currency. The sudden imposi-

tion of a requirement for payment in gold and silver caused considerable discontent and disputes among the merchants.

The second reason for the decline in trade in Baku following the establishment of the customs administration was the merchants' inability or unwillingness to adapt to the new regulations, which led many of them to abandon Baku and relocate to other areas, particularly Salyan²⁸. By "new regulations," what is meant in practice was the crude behavior of customs inspectors towards merchants and even local residents, including attempts in many instances to extort duties on goods for which duties had already been paid, and the confiscation of goods when such payments could not be extracted. **Specifically, according to Directive No. 55 issued by Ivanov, Director of the Astrakhan Customs Office, on 6 February, any goods that had been brought into Baku before the customs house officially opened, and on which transit taxes or duties had already been paid under the traditional khanate system, were subject to confiscation if a merchant wished to send them elsewhere but did not declare them to the customs house or refused to pay the required duties again.** In practice, this amounted to double taxation on goods for which duties had already been paid. For example, a resident of the village of Hovsan named Subhan filed a complaint with Lieutenant General Repin, explaining that when he was transporting four wool belts (which had

been used to decorate his house during a holiday and subsequently returned to the city) purchased from a Baku merchant named Mammad Ali the Baku Port Customs Office demanded a duty of two silver rubles²⁹. Such complaints were exceedingly common. Both rural and urban residents were frequently subjected to excessive demands by the customs authorities, and any poor villager bringing goods to the city to sell was taken to the customs office. They and their goods were only released once they had paid the necessary duties and the fee for stamped papers. Residents lodged daily complaints with the Baku commandant about the conduct of the guards stationed at the customs checkpoint. **What compelled imperial officials to behave in this manner towards local residents and merchants?** The first reason was undoubtedly the desire to generate revenue through the collection of duties. The second reason was concern over the uncontrolled transport of goods from other khanates and Iran into Baku under the pretext of them being local products. However, the customs administration already employed inspectors to prevent such smuggling. In order to mitigate the growing dissatisfaction, the Baku commandant, Repin, proposed in a report to General Tormasov dated 11 February 1810 that the customs authorities could be ordered to affix official seals to goods brought into the city before the opening of the customs office and for which duties had been paid according to khanate tradition. This, he argued, would prevent the daily confiscation

of villagers' household items, as they often lacked full knowledge of Russian laws. **Another (third) factor contributing to the decline in trade in Baku** was the requirement for merchants bringing goods into the city to pay duties multiple times. For instance, a merchant would pay a transit fee in Derbent, then pay duties again when passing through Quba, and finally pay a third duty upon arrival in Baku. This triple imposition of duties was burdensome for merchants and detrimental to the region's trade and industry. Addressing the complaints and documented negative practices, such as the detention of residents and merchants, the imposition of arbitrary duties, and the confiscation of goods, Tormasov, in a letter to the Baku Customs Office, recommended that the Baku Port Border Customs should affix customs seals to all goods brought into the city that had been subject to traditional khanate duties prior to the customs office's opening, in order to put an end to the chaos. Regarding the export of goods abroad or the import of goods from Persia, the customs administration retained the right to carry out its oversight based on the legal provisions granted to it. **In his official letter, Tormasov wrote,** *"As far as I know, merchants pay transit fees (rahdar) in Derbent for their goods, then make an additional payment when passing through Quba, and finally pay duties again when bringing the goods into Baku. There is a customs post in Derbent, which ought to collect duties on the goods brought by merchants and affix*

*a customs seal. Therefore, it is impermissible to levy duties again on these goods in Quba and Baku. However, if the goods are transported through Derbent to Baku and no duties have been collected en route, naturally the Baku Customs must collect duties on them*³⁰. It should be noted that following the implementation of the Russian customs duty system, the weakening of trade in Baku and the failure to achieve the anticipated customs revenues sparked discussions about whether the Baku Customs Office should suspend its operations altogether. In essence, these issues were directly linked to problems concerning economic security. In an attempt to evade the payment of customs duties “payable to the Imperial Treasury,” merchants who had previously transported their goods “through Baku to Shirvan, Shaki, Quba, Derbent, and then to Dagestan” began to reroute their trade via the Ashagi Liman (Lower Port), which belonged to the Quba Khanate, and towards Salyan in Shirvan³¹. Goods that had traditionally been transported from Iran through Baku to Dagestan were now being unloaded in Salyan or transported around Baku to avoid paying customs fees. Goods brought into Baku were limited mainly to items needed for use within the fortress (the city itself). As Salyan was under the control of the Shirvan Khan, the khan retained the right to collect transit fees (rahdar) on goods brought there. Moreover, because there was no customs post in Salyan subordinate to the Baku Customs Office, the goods unloaded and

subsequently distributed or sold there generated no revenue for the imperial treasury. **The redirection of a portion of Baku’s trade to Salyan forced imperial officials to search for solutions to overcome the resulting crisis.** Otherwise, trade in Baku could completely collapse, and the Baku Customs Office would face the threat of ceasing its operations entirely.

In his letter to General Repin dated 10 January 1811, Tormasov stated, “*Given that there is no customs outpost (zastava) of the Baku Customs Office in Salyan, it would be more beneficial for the treasury to reinstate the traditional khanate method of customs collection in Baku and to abolish the customs office altogether. Goods transported along the Baku district, bypassing the Baku Customs Office, are secretly brought into the fortress, resulting in the loss of revenue for the treasury. To prevent this, permission should be obtained to conduct inspections in the villages of the Baku district. If anyone is found to be moving goods outside the customs system, they must be brought before the customs authority to pay the required duties. Consequently, I inform the Baku Customs Administration that, according to the existing agreement and until an arrangement is reached with the Khan of Shirvan—who holds special privileges under His Imperial Majesty—it is not yet possible to establish a customs zastava in Salyan. Furthermore, I cannot grant permission for the abolition of the Baku Customs Office, as it was established by the supreme will of the Emperor.*

As before, I propose that, for the benefit of the treasury and with the necessary assistance from military personnel where required, permission be given to conduct customs inspections in Baku's villages and at the Sumgait Cossack post³²". To mitigate the losses inflicted on the state treasury, the Tsarist administration dispatched a customs officer from the Baku Customs Office to Salyan. To assist him, two companies of soldiers and a vessel to patrol the Caspian coastline were also allocated. However, these measures failed to yield the desired results.

Another (fourth) reason for the decline in trade in Baku after the opening of the customs office was the fact that merchants, who were unaccustomed to paperwork procedures, the presentation of declarations, stamping, and strict inspections of goods, chose to close their warehouses and shops and leave Baku for other locations. Many of Baku's wealthiest merchants relocated to Iran and attempted to move their families there as well. Prior to the establishment of the customs office, almost all Iranian traders brought their goods directly to Baku, which they regarded as the best port, from various regions. However, with the introduction of the customs regime in Baku, these merchants faced numerous difficulties in clearing their goods, excessive delays, and disproportionately high duties, which compelled them to abandon Baku in search of alternative trading centers. Iranian traders began redirecting their commercial activities towards Salyan,

Shirvan, Shaki, and other areas. Before the customs office was opened, nearly 10,000 bales of goods were imported annually through Baku from different regions³³. At that time, the duty on one bale was one silver manat. However, as mentioned, the new requirement to pay duties in gold coins (chervon) created significant difficulties. In a report dated 7 February 1811, Repin enclosed petitions from various traders arriving from Anzali, in which they stated that they would willingly pay the treasury the required duty—one chervon per bale—if only they were not burdened with paperwork, forced to unpack their bales, or delayed in releasing their goods. Repin viewed this proposal favorably, remarking that the treasury could receive twice the current revenue and trade in Baku could return to its former levels³⁴.

A further (fifth) reason for the weakening of trade in Baku after the opening of the customs office was the frequent outbreaks of epidemics in the region. Thus, the plague and bubonic plague epidemics that were frequent in Iran and the Ottoman Empire resulted in the entry of diseases into the Russian borders. This led to the weakening of trade with those countries and, as a result, had a negative impact on the collection of customs duties. For instance, a report dated 7 March 1808 explicitly noted that *"the infectious disease prevailing in Astrakhan has harmed trade in Baku, resulting in decreased collections by the Baku customs office"*³⁵.

Another (sixth) factor that contributed to the decline of trade in Baku after the opening of the customs office was the Russo-Iranian War that began in 1804. During the initial period of the Baku customs office's operation, military security considerations were prioritized over economic interests for the Russian Empire. Against the backdrop of war, measures taken for security—such as the detention of Russian merchant ships (which mainly carried goods belonging to merchants from Astrakhan and Baku) in Iranian ports, as well as Iranian merchants' reluctance to approach the Russian fleet stationed in Baku and the restrictions imposed—effectively prohibited trade with Iran through the Baku port. The compulsory limitations faced by both Russian and Iranian merchants in trade relations resulted in undesirable consequences: the volume of trade and state revenues declined significantly compared to the period under the khanates. Consequently, the Baku customs treasury was deprived of its expected income. Recognizing the “unacceptability of obstacles that hinder trade”, the Commander-in-Chief in the Caucasus, N.F. Rtishchev, issued an order on 26 November 1812 instructing that “the export of all local products to Iran, as well as the import of Iranian goods, should be immediately restored according to former practices.”³⁶

Another reason for the decline in trade in Baku was the rise of smuggling following the commencement of the customs office's operations, large-

ly driven by factors already noted above—such as the burdensome duties and complicated paperwork. While inspecting the area surrounding the city, Ivanov discovered that, as in Tiflis, there were numerous routes “well-suited for the covert movement of goods”. The smuggling routes revealed that the control exercised solely by the Baku customs office was insufficient to curb such activities³⁷. For this reason, Ivanov proposed to the Governor-General of Georgia the establishment of additional customs posts in Ganja (Yelizavetpol), Shusha, Shaki, Shirvan, Salyan, Derbent, and Quba. In doing so, a “chain of customs checkpoints extending from Samukh to Salyan and from there to Baku and Derbent” would be formed. It should be noted that the first steps in this direction involved the establishment of outposts in Derbent and Quba.

Conclusion

After the establishment of the customs office in Baku, the volume of trade turnover declined. This situation led to a decrease in customs revenue and even prompted discussions about the possible closure of the Baku customs office. The unreasonable imposition of duties by Tsarist officials not only on merchants but also on peasants who brought their goods to market caused significant discontent. The decline in trade turnover compelled the government to take important measures to revive commerce in Baku. Permission was granted for cus-

toms duties to be collected not only in gold and silver coins but also in local khan currency. As a result, the cargo turnover at the Baku port began to increase³⁸. Consequently, due to the strict control exercised by the Baku customs administration, the Tsarist government began to benefit more consistently from customs revenues. For instance, while customs revenues from Azerbaijan amounted to 7 932 rubles in 1809 (even though the initial projected expense for establishing the customs office was 7 628 rubles), they rose to 9 087 rubles in 1810, 13 183 rubles in 1811, 26 145 rubles in 1812, 16 191 rubles in 1815, 33 743 rubles in 1817, 29 227 rubles in 1818, and 51 853 rubles in 1820, with these figures continuing to grow in subsequent years³⁹.

However, the opening of the customs office in Baku and the collection of duties there alone were insufficient to control all trade within Azerbaijan. The increase in smuggling made the establishment of outposts (zastavas) necessary. On November 26, 1810, the Derbent customs office was officially opened. Following Derbent, a

customs office was also established in Quba⁴⁰. However, the creation of the Quba customs administration was delayed until March 1811 due to an uprising that occurred in 1810⁴¹. In accordance with a decree issued on January 26, 1811, the Quba zastava was officially opened on March 1, 1811⁴². The zastava considered the presence of a mounted patrol along trade routes essential to prevent merchants from evading customs duties⁴³.

In 1811, based on a proposal from the Baku customs administration and with the consent of the Shirvan Khan, Mustafa Khan, the Russian government established a customs post in Salyan as well. This post was intended to monitor land routes to prevent the clandestine transport of goods. However, the establishment of customs zastavas in Derbent and Quba, and the customs post in Salyan, did not fully resolve the existing problems related to the collection of customs duties. This was because the payment of duties was only permitted at customs offices, while such operations were not carried out at the border checkpoints.

Notes

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