

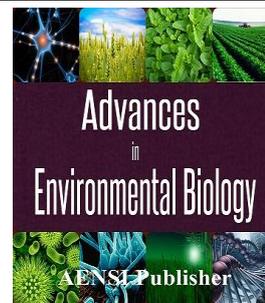


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Trade Relations between Iran and the Arabs in Sasanian Period

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ABSTRACT

The Sassanid Empire during 400 years of life had economic ties with neighbor lands of Arab region of the southern Persian Gulf, Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula. The Silk Road as the main commercial communication route from East Asia to the East Mediterranean and North Africa played an important role in facilitating trade communication of the Sasanian and Arabs in addition; the Persian Gulf sea route was used for trading with the Arabs. From the time of Shapur II (379-309.m) economic ties of Sasanian with the Arabs further expanded. Carpet, silk fabrics, brocades, silk, etc. were the main exchanging goods between Iran and the Arab lands. In this research various aspects of economic relations of the Sassanid Empire with Arab territories; including Hira, Ghassan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and south of the Persian Gulf has been studied.

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INTRODUCTION

One way of establishing economic and commercial relations between nations is to strengthen friendly relations, which has long been of interest to many countries and its history dates from the time of ancient civilizations and states. From the context of the past Iranians also were trying to establish economic and trade relations with near and far, East-West lands and territories around the world. Particular geographical situation of Iran over the important trade routes between East and West has led to the development of economic relations of the Iranian businessmen and business with other areas and was great interest for our country. During the Persian Sassanid Empire and neighboring lands such as Arabs had established extensive trade and various items such as carpets, brocade fabrics, silk, linen, wool skin were exchanged between Iran and the Arab lands of Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula and southern Gulf. Crossing the Silk Road from Persia to the Mediterranean coast and North Africa has been an important factor in facilitating business communications among Iranians and Arab regions. Research on the economic relations between the Sassanid's and the Arabs, however, is faced with the problem of lack of historical documents but based on historical sources of Islamic era and the writings of the Roman historian understanding the relationships and dimensions can be partly achieved.

Iran's Trade with the Arabs in Sasanian period:

The importance of Hira state in the time of empire of several dynasties had a fundamental role in the Iran and Arabs relations. However, given the position and influence of Governors the relations of Hira were strengthen or weaken but not at any time the ties were cut. One of the most important people who played a significant role in the development of relations between Iran and the Arabs is Munther, Munther after resettlement in Hira reinforced their relations with the Sassanid and turned his attention to Arabia and his brutal attacks caused panic in Byzantine people.

In the area of trade, it is likely that Saudi Arabia was connected to the Sassanid Empire, by the Silk Road. Arabian Peninsulawas in the course of two-way trade of silk and perfumes, the Silk Road from Upper Arvand River (Tigris) entered the Arabia. Passed by Sarhan valley (Dumah Aljandal) by the Basri city in north lead to Damascus and connected to West. But the perfumes road (condiment) started from Ports in the Gulf of Aden

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and along the Red Sea around the peninsula. This road passed Mecca and finally connected to Damascus and the west [19].

It seems that Hira became a commercial trade-in center very quickly because of its location - which was located on the Silk Road. Jarah Caravans (the old port on the south coast of the Arabian Peninsula) that were moving toward the upper Euphrates on land or by ship with loads of incense, like whatever passed through the Syrian to the Persian Gulf passed through the town. Lakhmids residents of Hira had gathered a wealth from taxes on business [1].

Therefore, the business was very helpful in the Arabian Peninsula. Mena bazaar, has been connected China Sea, Jeddah, JAR, Egypt warehouses, Wadi Alqra, Shaam, Iraq, Yemen, center of (buy or sell) fillet, agate, and skin. Apothecary items, perfumes, musk, saffron, teak, Sussman, ivory, Lulu, Diba, beads, ruby, ebony, coconut, sugar, iron, lead, bamboo, pottery, sandals, crystal, pepper, etc. they were all brought to Oman and Iraq and were taken to east. And all of this plus amber, beverages, shield, leopard skin and Ethiopian servants, were taken to Aden and were brought to Mecca and west from there [12].

On the other hand, since the major economies of the Arabs were ranches, considerable amounts of Sasanian coins in return of animal skin, were brought to Arabia by caravans. Finally, it should be said that the Jewish trade was supported by the Sassanids and it was their support that placed them against Byzantine [14].

But Mecca also played the interface role between East and West in the world. The geographical position and neutrality of Quraysh provided an opportunity to achieve widespread success. They won a commercial treaty and agreements with the Byzantine and Ctesiphon. In signing these treaties, agent in Bahrain was the representative of the Iranian. However, delegates from the Roman and Iran merchants entered Mecca and contracted terms with the rich people there [16].

Popular industries of Iran were carpet and industries of woolen and brocade textile. The main export of Iran was silk fabrics, carpets, pearls, skin and horses. Silk was especially important. Raw silk came from China to Iran and was sold to western countries. The goods that entered to Iran were silk from China, paper from India and spices and expensive gems from Arabia. Nasiben city was a major center of trade between Iran and Rome. In other cities of Mesopotamia were forming a yearly markets and goods from Iran, China and India, were sold to the Roman merchants.

Toward the end of the Sassanid competition with Byzantine for control of trade with India was increased. The Sassanids had Bahrain and Oman in control and in the year 570 AD, Yemen was an Iranian site. Guspas described competition between the Byzantine and Sassanid merchants on the west coast of India and "Procopius," states that the Iranians were in all India trade.

Political relations in the late Sassanid era had somewhat affected the business. Most goods were exchanged through several roads in East-West trade. These roads were main and important routes for business. Closing of one of them can be known as a result of reduced volume of trade or possibly increased importance of other routes. In addition to the water route of the Red Sea in the East the major routes were: the Silk Road and spices and perfumes Pathway.

Silk Road was an important way along the Iranian plateau to China. Caravan through which goods were shipped from the Persian Gulf to the East to India and China and south to East Africa. Yet these two routes were not in the inner regions of the peninsula because the tribal structure of the Arabian Peninsula had caused the trade and commerce to be limited to a few cities in the region and the desert tribes assembled at certain times of the year came to this city, yet each of the major states of Ghassan and Hira had trade relations with Iran and Rome [2].

As soon as the change of government in Iran Ardeshir show sensitivity against the trade and tried to cut a major arms of trade and that independent government was Kharasen in the estuaries of the Tigris and Euphrates that the goods loaded on the shores of India and brought to Kharasen by the Persian Gulf. And there, behind the desert Arabs as Palmirys and Petrayees carried them to Roman territory in Syria and minor Asia and Egypt, in the same way that the Syrian desert cities of Palmira, and Petra in today Jordan had a lot of power.

With the advent of Shapur this trade also continued but in a different and longer direction that was out of Iran's control. Kushanees and Romans exchanged their goods in Egypt or Saudi Arabia or Yemen or Ethiopia that was completely out of Iran's Kingdom and Iran could not restrict them [17].

Long before conversion of Constantinople to the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Arab Petra and Palmira states were on the commercial ways. Petra Arab state which was on the way of Hijaz and southern Saudi Arabia and also on the way of West Africa had a privileged and key position. Palmira which also was right in the border of the Roman Empire was located next to a route called Diocletian, and connected important coastal cities of Phoenicia and Syria and Mesopotamian deserts [15].

By the failure of Narse from Galerius in 298 AD, under the command of Arab Bedouin tribes of southern Mesopotamia (Hira rulers - Molouk Al Munther) tried in the Sassanid weakness period, along the borders of that Empire to rely more on their own resources. At the beginning of the fourth century AD, the news was being established beyond the borders of Iran, which did not benefit the Sassanid state. And Tabari wrote: At that time foreigners - Turks and Romans - were informed that the Iranians do not have a king and do not know what will

happen. So Turks and Romans had a taste of the country but of all the countries the Arabs lands were closer to Iran and its people were in need more than other people who were in need to steal others food and home, because they were poor, therefore many groups of them arrived to Ray shahr and Ardeshir coast and other coasts of Iran from Abdalqis, Bahrain and kazma – from the sea [13].

In the reign of Shapur II among Arabs there was an emir called Amro Al qeis who was ruling on some of the Arab tribes that were united under his supervision. It seems that at that time the Arabs of south Persian Gulf wanted to avail themselves of Iranian domination.

In fact, at the beginning of the fourth century AD Amro Al qeis were able to grow the Union of Arab tribes. Using Persian and Roman names in inscriptions, is an indication of the relationship of that strong government by Arab emir that seems those relationships are more related to the peace between the Sassanid -After the war contract of Nisibis 298 AD - until the recent attacks against Arabs, Iranians have been led by Shapur II [10].

Therefore Arab emir's gravestone inscription apparently refers to the reconciliation and peace period between Persia and Rome, and parties, especially the Iranians that peace had been imposed on them, were in silence [15].

It seems that Amro Al qeis was in the head of the defeated Arab who had fled to the borders of the Byzantine Empire and while much of his reign, was maintaining the unity of the Arab tribes, also was communicating with Iran's king [15].

Tabari states the Union of Amro Al qeis and Sassanid imperial in Shapur I time and emphasizes that at the time of Shapur I, Amro Al qeis Amro ibn Adyibn Rabi ibn Nasr, and the charge d'affaires of Shapur on Arab desert nomads died. Shapur - as have been said - sat his son Omar Ibn Amro Al qeis on the throne [13].

Also in the fourth century AD, the Red Sea and its coastal areas had always been a controversial policy of the Byzantine and Sassanian. Both powers demanded to access quality goods of Far East primarily silk and spices, incense and other requirements which were passing the Arabian Business roads, and enjoy the benefits of transit trade. One of the most sensitive areas of trade and military policies was Bab el-Mandab Strait at the southern end of the Red Sea and Romans in 196 BC to 400 AD were placed the port of Aden to the Straits of their disposal. On the other hand, Sassanids were eager to make the Hijaz and eastern shores of the Red Sea secure. That was because Shapur II was constantly interfering in Arab affairs and the war - which seemed to be the only possible solution - expanded its authority within the territory of Saudi Arabia and the Middle of that land and even invaded close to the Jewish town of Yathrib [1].

This policy on the continuing policy of Shapur I is based on in the maritime Silk Road of Central Asia through Sindh to southern coast of Arabia and along the Red Sea to Palestine and in commercial competition with the Roman military that Shapur II with courage and strength, wanted to demonstrate the power of the Persians to the Arab tribes of the coast and also the Romans, that continued his extensive military operations. Of course it is possible that Amro Al qeis has operated to prevent further attacks, as a bridge between the Great Roman Empire and the Sassanid Iran.

It seems that Shapur II in his brutal attacks against Arabs - that was the beginning of his reign - had motives except revenge the death of his father, the second Hormuz in Alahsa' and those war movements have been a warning to the Romans [13]. King of Rome "Alyanus" started the war with Shapur and all Arab tribes helped him, and all the Arab tribes invaded Shapur and marched to the capital where he ran, city and royal treasures were looted. Shapur became Arabs enemy [20]. Of his works was to pierce shoulders of Arab heads then would kill them that's why Shapur was named "Zol 'Aktāf" that means "The owner of the shoulders" [9]. Actually, Shapur's purpose, in addition to the suppression of the Arab tribes, was intimidation in the Roman Empire in the West Asia. After the invasion, Shapur settled a large number of mainly Bedouin Arabs in one place.

At the height of intense battles with Arab tribes, Amro Al qeis was able to prevent war continues and somehow compromise of the subsequent killings [10]. He died in the 328 AD and Writing Arabic inscription tribal unity and reverence towards the Persians (Iranian), indicates the crucial presence of Arab lands in maintaining peace [3].

Hira economy:

Hira people were employed in agriculture and sheepherding. The nature where Hira was located in, required these two professions. Hira's location in the flourishing area and at the shore of the "Kafar" river had made at the same time, the two types of nomadic living and urbanization. Hira's people in addition to agriculture and sheepherding also were engaged in trade and commerce. The closeness of Hira to the Euphrates, which enables people to sit on the ship on the Euphrates and board the ship and travel the sea, and cruise from the East to India and China, and the West to Eden and Bahrain. Since Hira was located at the seaside and ships harbor which came from China, India and, elsewhere, major merchants used to travel there. Caravans carried merchandises of India, China, Oman and Bahrain to Tadmar and Huran by Hira. Employment in this profession, Hira's people benefited from great wealth out of this profession.

In Hira's Industries, skills were used so much that all industries have been attributed to Hira. Textile, silk, cotton and wool weaving, in particular, is the most important industry of Hira. The mining industry and ornamental objects, was also Hira's the most advanced technology [16].

The role of economic relations between Arabs and Sasanian in the strength and weakness of the Empire:

Iran, both through ports and Persian Gulf and through land routes has had associations with the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent from very long time. This, on the one hand is due to the necessity and economic needs and on the other hand, due to the nations cultural and historical commonalities. Many residents and people of subcontinent migrated to Iran and established a permanent settlement [9].

Due to the closure of the boundaries of the subcontinent or impassability of its North and North West, communications and Conditions of residents of subcontinent between Mesopotamia and Iran were of great importance and necessity. Although both land and naval routes were of great importance and connected India to the civilized world of that day but as less importance of land and had caused much inconvenience by bandits and on the other hand fleets had more power in transportation of goods and passengers and also the improvement of road safety was better provided, communication of subcontinent residents to the Persian Gulf and ports which were the center of world trade in those days was considered to be very important. In fact, intellectual, cultural and economic exchanges and Conditions of subcontinent with cultural and commercial centers of Iran and Mesopotamia were realized through the Persian Gulf [15].

Commercial relations between India and Persian Gulf coasts and islands have a very long history. King Solomon used to supply gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacock from India. Ptolemaic people had built ports in banks of Red Sea in order to benefit more from Indian goods. Seleucids had constructed ports in the Persian Gulf due to same intentions. Greeks prepared rice, ginger and cinnamon by the Malabar Coast. Persians and Romans also used to trade with India and therefore had built ports in Persian Gulf including the port "Ablah" which Indian sailors had communications surrounding areas in centuries five and six AD [16].

Before the advent of Islam, economic relations with India and other countries were of such importance that it was the intense competition between Iran and Rome. Iran and Rome were able to release largely eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean markets out of the Arabs hands, but now had conflict to seize the border. Thus the military -political dispute of Iran and Rome was accompanied by fierce economic and commercial competition, resulting in a weakening of both countries and Arabs exploitation of their weaknesses [16].

Arabs have many advantages in terms of geography. Bahrain, Oman, Hadramaut, Yemen and the Hejaz are in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf and normally are in a place which addressing the needs of the marine business are one of its priorities. Additionally, the Arabs had a good position for the transfer of goods to other parts of Europe. Ships off the coast of India arrived to Yemen ports, where they transported their goods by camel and through Mediterranean Sea to Europe. 1) First way: the merchants first would come from Egypt and Syria through land roads in the east coast of the Red Sea to Yemen.

They board the ship from there; some would go to Africa and some to Hadramaut, Oman, Bahrain, and Iraq and from there to the Iranian coast in the Persian Gulf. In this way, merchants would go to Tiz port in Makranor Dybl port in Send, or to areas farther to Khmbayat and Katyavar. From there they would get to Kozhikode or Cape Kumuryn by sea and then to Krumandl and after a few ports in the Bay of Bengal arrived to Burma and Malaya and China and when they returned to the same path [16]. One of the problems of this way was passing through the territory of Mydha and other nations of bandits in Send. 2) The second path was more secure. The merchants could go to Colmen in Malabar through ports and islands and anchored in Persian Gulf directly through India Sea. Most merchant ships chose this way especially ships that were going to China. From Colmen this way emerged with the first one. After the Malabar coasts, ships could stop or business with residents of the islands such as the Maldives and Sranadeeband continue. Some ships also after Malabar would go to Java or Sumatra, but the ultimate goal of most ships, was the port of Canton in China.

The third way: was the famous Silk Road some of commercial travelers and merchants would go to North West of India and Send and through central Asia or through Kabul and Ghazni from the way which was of the Silk road branch. A large number of Muslim traders lived in cities of this region and many commercial convoys were in transit from Multan to Khorasan [16].

To enter other industrial field in country for cultivation, this was used as war captives were divided into several groups, they resided them in different countries, and so many people were migrated to Susa by Darius I [8]. Shapur I resided Roman captives in Gondi Shapur, where the skills of Romans were used in engineering work and section was called "Caesar" on the cover [19]. Shapur II the prisoners who had been arrested in the city, resided between Susa and Shushtar and other lands of Ahwaz and these people cultivated new kinds of weaving silk and brocades [11].

Most of the times these place that were cultivated by captives, would soon be desolated, but sometimes remained steady and constant [18].

Role of ports and routes in relation of Arabs with Sasanian:

About trade ports can be said that, from Caspian Sea trades were done because ports that the coasts are not mentioned, indicates that people who lived in today's Gilan and Mazandaran had a far civilization and coarse behavior. Therefore, it cannot be imagined that they had trade with other people by the Caspian Sea [2]. Arabian resources believe that in Sasanid period Iranian were dominant on sea and coast while Arab tribes were living in mountains and deserts [4]. One of these ports was Bakht Ardeshir port (present Booshehr) that beside other documents shows the importance of Sasanid kings.

Several routs exist among Arab tribes such as Bahrain rout and Oman route which are very difficult. Also Bahrain Aden rout and Basra rout which are very difficult to pass [6].

A history writes: that in Sasanid period, Iranian were dominant on ports and coasts while Arab tribes were living in mountains and deserts. In spite of this, resources have referred so many times to naval force of Sasanid, in Ardeshir's time and once in king Khosro I.

In Ardeshir's report of deeds has been referred to one of these ports named BakhtArdeshir (present Booshehr) which beside other documents shows the importance of Persian Gulf for first Sasanid kings. The importance of this port is that Bakht Ardeshir was connected to Kazerun and Shiraz and by that way imported goods were carried to other regions. Also its closeness to Shiraz the center of Fars province had changed there to an important port. Another important port was Siraf [5]. That was connected to Firoozabad and Shiraz by a road. The existence of this port in Sasanid period is important due to discovery of some potteries and coins in this area. Of other important ports, Bandare Hormoz can be referred to along a strait with this name which is connected to Sirjan by Loofer rout. Gozran or kujran Ardeshir port was near Bandar Lenge which was important in sea trade and meeting the needs of Darab in Fars [5].

In Qobad I time Iran continued its mediation in universal trade. In Iran and for trade experts, transit, dealers and agents all kinds of transportation and leaders of caravans and navigators for sea transportation was formed.

Iran, Babel, Syria, and Palestine were connected economically. Iran imported metal ware, also skin and wood textiles, Papyrus, rice, Saffron and condiments were imported. Internal trade by the large number of big and small trade houses and markets where the merchandises were sold in them were increasing therefore it can be said although in Arab lands and internal areas they were facing economic crisis but in the borders economy and trade had flourished.

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