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# MILITARY AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN THE CAUCASUS-CASPIAN REGION FOR CONTROL OVER ONE OF THE MAIN BRANCHES OF THE GREAT SILK ROAD – THE CASPIAN ROUTE (III-XV CENTURIES)

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**Abstract:** The article reveals the content of the ever-increasing role of the Caucasus-Caspian region in global geopolitical and geoeconomic processes in the Middle Ages. It provides a detailed study of the military and political events occurring during this period and reveals the struggle of the main rival forces to establish their control over the main trade routes stretching from Europe and China, India and Central Asia. In this connection, the extremely important military-strategic and economic significance of one of the main branches of the Great Silk Road is demonstrated – the famous Caspian Route, which ran along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, which became famous back in ancient times.

The aim of the study is to analyze the military-political processes occurring in the region in the Middle Ages and to reveal the military events that took place from the 3rd century to the end of the 14th century in the region, which was subjected to spontaneous geo-ethnopolitical pressure from successive military-political forces. In the course of studying this problem, the main responsibilities were to highlight the great migrations of peoples, as well as the invasions of the Arabs, Rus, Seljuks, Mongols, Golden Horde and Timurids, which coincided with the directions of the main world trade routes, including the Caspian, and constituted one of their main strategic goals. In the article, historical-chronological and comparative research methods were used to reveal the problem. In the final part of the article, it is noted that the Middle Ages marked the intensification of military and political rivalry in the Caucasus-Caspian region for control over the Caspian route. Beginning in the 10th century, the first signs of a renewed desire of non-Caspian states to penetrate and strengthen their positions in this region by one means or another were observed. With the emergence of the powerful Ottoman Empire and the strong Azerbaijani states of Ak Koyunlu from the middle of the 15th century, and then from the beginning of the 16th century, – The Safavid state, the Caucasus-Caspian region becomes one of the key elements in the relations between Asia and Europe, which during this period acquired the character of a military-political confrontation.

**Key words:** geopolitical and geoeconomic space, intracontinental Eurasian territories, cultural and economic expansion, ethnic groups, transport routes and sea routes

## Introduction

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The Middle Ages are characterized by a saturation of military and political events caused by the desire of rival forces to establish their control over the main trade routes stretching from Europe on the one hand and from China, India and Central Asia on the other, which intersected in the Caucasus-Caspian region and acquired an ever-increasing role in global geopolitical and geoeconomic processes. In this connection, one of the main branches of the Great Silk Road, the famous Caspian Route, which ran along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, acquired an extremely important military-strategic and economic significance.

For over a thousand years from the 3rd century until the end of the 14th century, this region was subjected to spontaneous geo-ethnopolitical pressure from successive military and political forces. During the 4th-8th centuries. The Caucasus-Caspian region is covered by powerful waves of migration flows from the northeast - numerous Turkic tribes - Huns, Sabirs, Khazars and others; in the 7th-8th centuries from the west - Arabs; in the 9th-12th centuries from the northwest - Rus; in the 11th century from the southeast - Seljuks, and in the 13th century - Mongols and finally, at the end of the 14th century - the Timur horde. Moreover, the main directions of the flows of the great migrations of peoples, as well as the invasions of the Arabs, Rus, Seldzhuks, Mongols, Golden Horde and Timurids coincided with the directions of the main world trade routes including the Caspian and constituted one of their main strategic goals.

**1. The Caucasus-Caspian region in the Middle Ages**

Already in the 2nd century, having emerged from the depths of Asia and crossed the Volga into the steppes of the northwestern Caspian region, the Huns settled down coming into contact with the Alans. The first clash between the Huns and the Alans led to the Huns who were nomadic in the steppes of the Azov-Caspian intercontinental zone, managing to break the continuity of the Alanian settlements and nomadism, throwing one part of the Alans to the south, to the foothills of the Caucasian ridge, and pressing the other part to the ridge and lower the Don. However, the Huns did not remain in the steppes of Northern Caucasus for long and together with the Alans in 371 they made campaigns into the lands of the Northern Black Sea region, colliding with the territory of the Ostrogoths. Finally, in 377/378 the Huns established themselves on the Danube border of the Byzantine Empire [1, pp.32-33]. At the same time, the departure of the bulk of the Hunnic tribes to the Danube did not at all mean that they had forgotten the road to the Caucasus. In 395 having passed through the Darial Pass, they invaded the Southern Caucasus and reached Mesopotamia and Syria. However having encountered stubborn resistance from the Persians, the Huns this time returned through the Derbent Pass to the steppes of the Northern Caucasus and then to the Danube [2, p. 36-37].

It should be noted that the departure of the bulk of the Huns from the steppes of Northern Caucasus in 371 to the west did not entail the displacement of all the Hunnic tribes. Some of them namely the Hunno-Bulghar tribes who moved in the late 60s of the 4th century from the area between the Ural and Volga rivers to the Caucasus, they did not follow the main Hunnic hordes to Europe, but remained nomadic in the northwestern part of the Caspian steppes. On the whole the Hunnic invasion and the subsequent collapse of the Iranian-speaking ethnic mass in the North Caucasus led to a sharp reshuffle of political and ethnic forces in this region and the influx of a number of new tribes from beyond the Volga and their settlement in the territory already from the 2nd century. covered by the first Hunnic migration wave was a powerful impetus to the general rise of the Hun-Bulgarian tribes, the growth of their military and political power in the North Caucasus. From this time on, the process of political unification of tribal groups with different origins, languages and cultures into an intertribal conflict began to intensively develop here, with their subsequent onslaught on Persia and Byzantium. During the

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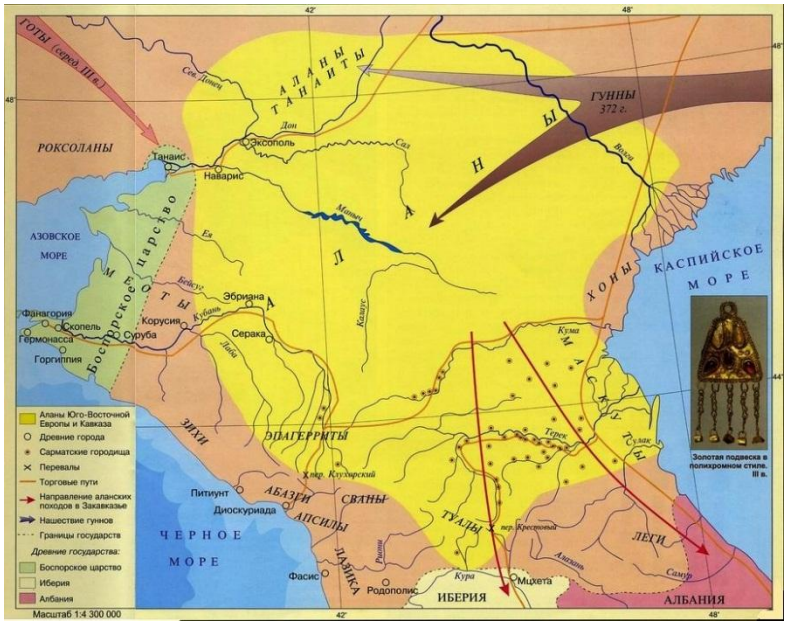
next two centuries – the 5th-6th centuries, successive tribal associations of the Hunno-Bulgar tribes in the North Caucasus led by the Onogurs and then by the Sabirs, repeatedly (in 466, 503, 515and etc.) made campaigns mainly through the Derbent Pass to the South Caucasus reaching the Byzantine possessions in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.

At the same time depending on the specific military-political situation, both Byzantium and Iran tried to use the Turkic Sabirs tribes in military actions against each other. This was facilitated by both the proximity of the borders between the Caspian nomads and these powers and the common theater of military operations for them. Moreover due to its geographic proximity to the North Caucasus, Iran took advantage of these circumstances much more often and more successfully than its main rival, Byzantium.




**The advance of northern nomads into the Caucasus-Caspian region in the early Middle Ages**

The most successful counterforce to the onslaught from the north of the powerful military-political unions of the Huns was the Sasanian Empire, which replaced the Parthian state in 224, including Persia, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Beludzhistan, Merv, a number of territories in Central Asia. Having subjugated Atropatena, the Sassanids strove to establish their complete control over the South Caucasus, and in particular, over the military-strategically important Albania with its Derbent Pass [3, pp. 24-25]. In sharp competition with the Roman Empire, Sasanian Persia managed at the end of the 4th century to extend its influence to the regions of the Western Caspian, which acquired the significance of a vital military-strategic bridgehead for the Sasanian Empire.

During the 5th-6th centuries, the Sasanian kings Ezdigerd II (438-457), Peroz (459-484) and Khosrow I (531-579) erected powerful military fortifications along the western coast of the Caspian Sea: Beshbarmak, Gilgilchay and Derbent. The most important in the military-strategic sense in this deeply echeloned, clearly thought out from a military point of view and maximally capable of adapting to the terrain system of defensive structures was the Derbent pass, located

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in the Albanian region of Chora. Here, where the Greater Caucasus Mountains come almost right up to the Caspian Sea, leaving only a narrow, 3.5 km coastal strip, a double row of fortress walls was built, extending several hundred meters into the sea. Here was also located the seaport – the largest in this period on the Caspian Sea [4, p.42, 55]. And this was not accidental, because, starting from the 6th century until the beginning of the 9th century, important trade routes connecting the countries of the Near East with South-Eastern Europe, the Lower Volga region and the North Caucasus, moved to the Caspian Sea basin.

Thus, beginning in the 5th century, the Sassanids, having strengthened their position on the shores of the Caspian Sea, established control over the Great Silk Route, which connected China with Central and Western Asia and further with Byzantium. The Sasanians also took over the middle sea trade between the Middle East, India and China [5, p.26]. In the east of the Caspian Sea, in the middle of the 5th century, most of the territory of Turkmenistan was conquered by the Ephtalites, and a hundred years later by the Turkic Khaganate. Meanwhile, in the North Caucasus, under the pressure of the Avars in 558

Meanwhile, in the Northern Caucasus, under the pressure of the Avars in 558, the once powerful military-political union of the Sabirs fell apart and they were forced to move to the Southern Caucasus and were resettled by Khosrow I mainly on the borders with Iberia with the aim of using these warlike nomads for covering from the north another important passage – the Darial Passage [2, pp. 98-99]. Thus, the Sassanids managed to establish their control over the two main communication routes connecting the Northern and Southern parts of the Caucasus – the Derbent (Albanian Gate) and Daryal (Alanian Gate) passes and to a significant extent ensure the protection of the northern borders of his empire, which, in turn, was of considerable military and strategic importance during the long and bloody wars with Byzantium during the 6th – early 7th centuries.

As for the situation in the Northern Caucasus, after the events of 558 which led to the simultaneous collapse of two Hunno-Bulgar Savir and Utigur tribal associations, the leading role among the tribes of the Eastern Ciscaucasia gradually passed to the Khazars. In this region, first the Western Turkic Khanate was formed, and then, after its collapse in 651, the Khazar Khanate. The first decades of the 7th century are characterized by cardinal geopolitical changes throughout the Near and Middle East, caused by the emergence of a new powerful religious and military-political force in the person of the Arab Caliphate. Under the banner of Islam, the Arabs managed to conquer Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, the Sasanian Empire and reach the western and southern coasts of the Caspian Sea during the 30s and 40s of the 7th century. Having established their control over Derbent (Bab el-Abwab) in 643, the Arabs took control of the entire Caspian-Volga trade route and all ports in the Caspian Sea.

At the beginning of the 8th century the Arabs also conquered Central Asia. In 716 the Arabs completed the conquest of the southern part of the territory of Turkmenistan from the Caspian Sea to the shores of the Amu Darya. Later, in the 9th-10th centuries, Turkmenistan was part of the Tahirid and Samanid states, and from the 11th century - the Seljuk Empire. In the 8th-10th centuries Islam was established in the south of Kazakhstan. During the 7th-8th centuries, long Arab-Khazar wars took place in the Caucasus-Caspian region with varying success and not allowing the Arabs to feel like complete masters in this vast region.

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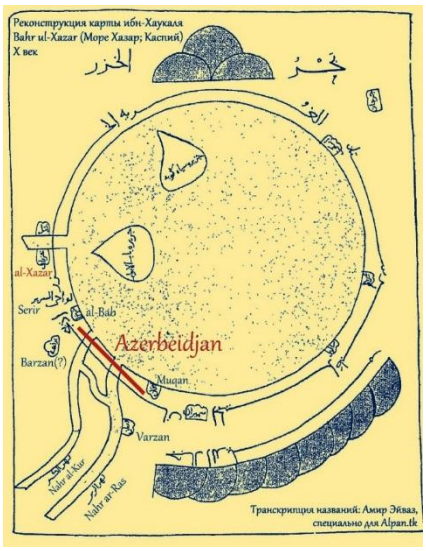


**The Caspian Sea on the map of the Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal.**
**10th century**

Although until the middle of the 9th century the Caliphate's maritime trade was mainly conducted via the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, nevertheless, the western, southern and south-eastern coasts of the Caspian Sea included in its composition strengthened trade links via the Volga and the Don with Europe. Moreover, international trade routes passed through the territory of Azerbaijan, connecting the Caliphate with the Khazars, the Eastern Slavs, and the Scandinavian countries. The ports located on the Caspian coast - from Abaskun and Astrabad in the south to Derbent in the west - supported active navigation. This was also facilitated by the fact that between the Christian part of the population of the Caucasian isthmus, politically and religiously connected with Byzantium, and the Muslims of the southwest of the Caspian, there was an antagonism that did little to favor overland trade relations. Moreover, the Caucasus with its steep and winding paths, inhabited by various tribes, was poorly suited for the construction of a trade route [6, p. 180]. During this period, the markets of Derbent were a gathering place for merchants with goods from almost the entire Caspian coast.

The Arabs having undermined the Byzantine trade routes across the Black Sea, turned the trade routes to the east, to the Caspian Sea, and took control of the Volga-Caspian trade route which had previously been in the hands of Byzantium. Having conquered the territory from Tiflis to Derbent, the Arabs very successfully controlled the flanks of the trade route along the Caspian Sea. All the ports on the Caspian Sea were in the hands of the Arabs, and the Khazars defeated by the Arabs did not pose a serious threat to the new trade route during this period [6, p.181]. Merchants from Azerbaijan, and through them Arab merchants, ascending the Volga, went north to the Bulgars, who by that time had already accepted Islam. In turn, the Rus merchants descended the Volga to the Caspian Sea and from the southern shores of the sea carried their goods on camels further, to Baghdad. The merchants from the Caliphate conducted trade directly with Kiev via the Caspian basin. Trade in the southern part of the Caspian basin was stimulated by the proximity of the largest markets of Baghdad, Bukhara and Samarkand, which had traditional extensive connections with numerous Asian countries with their developed handicraft industries [6, p.179-180].

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At the same time, it is difficult not to agree with the opinion of Lev Gumilev that "the southern, southwestern and southeastern coasts of the Caspian are much more connected with the internal regions: Iran, Azerbaijan and Sogdiana" united in the Sassanid Empire (224-651) and in the Arab Caliphate (632-1258) and for which The Caspian regions were a distant outskirts – a "dead end" that had little influence on the fate of these great powers [7, p.62]. He explains this by geographic factors related to the fact that the regions adjacent to the southern coast of the Caspian Sea - Deylem (Gilan), Tabaristan (Mazandaran) and Jurjan (Gurgan), separated from the Iranian plateau by the Elburz ridge, differ from arid Persia by their climatic features – abundance of precipitation and moisture. Streams flowing down from the mountains form murgabas – estuaries with standing water, separated from the sea by shallows. The water in these estuaries stagnates and access to the open sea is difficult [7, p.62]. In this regard, undoubtedly, the most favorable natural and climatic conditions were on the western coast of the Caspian Sea with large rivers flowing into it, of which the Volga and Kura were the most suitable for navigation - these waterways leading to the north - to Eastern Europe and deep into the interior Caucasus.

**2. Military and political rivalry in the Caucasus-Caspian region for control over the Caspian route in the 9th-15th centuries.**

After the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate during the 9th century. independent state associations are formed on the territory of Azerbaijan, Persia and Central Asia - the Shirvanshahs, Sadjids, Salarids, Ravvadids, Sheddadids in Azerbaijan, the Tahi-Rids in Khorasan and certain regions of Central Asia, the Saffarids in the southeast and the Buyids in the west and southwestern Persia. The Samanid state also included Central Asia and the northeastern regions of Iran. In the western Caspian region, the state of the Shirvanshahs, which existed until the middle of the 16th century, began to play an increasingly important role. Already at the end of the 10th century. Baku became a significant coastal city with a convenient harbor, taking part in international transit trade both by sea and by land caravan routes.

Information about the Absheron Peninsula, its oil, islands and eternal flame is provided by the famous Arab geographer, traveler and writer of the 10th century, Masudi who visited Shirvan and sailed on the Caspian Sea. He noted that on Absheron and the nearby islands "powerful fountains of lights beat out, visible at night from a very great distance" [8, p. 43]. In the 10th-15th centuries the importance of Baku as one of the rich cities of Shirvan increased. From Baku (in the south of the peninsula) and Bilgah (in the north), oil, salt, madder, silk and other goods were exported to distant countries both by sea and by land [9, p.112]. During this period, world trade connecting Europe with India and China, was carried out along the southern land route through Central Asia and Persia, the southern regions of Azerbaijan and along the northern road, along the shore of the Caspian Sea, past the Derbent pass to Khazaria and further to the north. Another important route went from Barda to Ardabil and to Persia and from the same Barda to Dvin and further to Syria and Mesopotamia [9, p.74]; there was also a highway running along the valley of the Araks River to Syria and Mesopotamia [9, p.74].

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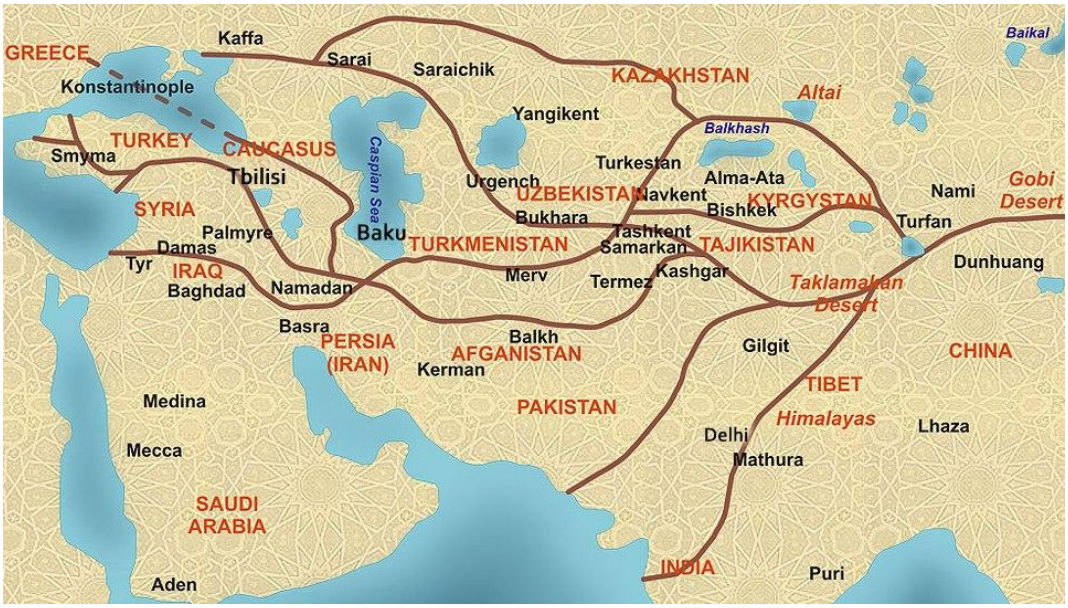


**The Great Silk Road. Middle Ages.**

During the same period the caravan route from China and India through Central Asia to the Caspian Sea operated. From here, goods were transported by sea and along the Kura and Rioni rivers to the Black Sea coast and then sent on to Byzantium. Absheron and Baku were connected to the main trade routes by means of local caravan roads running from Baku along the sea coast and further to the lower reaches of the Kura; another road went from Baku to the northwest, to the central part of the peninsula, then it turned to the west, through Gobustan to Shemakha and finally, a third route branching off from the second to the northwest in the direction of the northern part of the peninsula, connected with the main trade route, going to Derbent. These ancient routes did not lose their significance in subsequent centuries [9, p.74].

Thus, the cities of Azerbaijan – Baku, Shemakha, Derbent, Tabriz, Ardabil and others located on the routes of international trade, connected the Arab Caliphate with a number of countries in the North and East taking an active part in this trade. Merchants from Khazaria, Russia, Persia, Byzantium and distant countries of the East - India, China, Iraq and Syria visiting these cities in exchange for their goods - honey, wax, furs, weapons, Chinese silk fabrics, spices, porcelain dishes, precious stones, etc., exported oil, salt, fish, cattle (mules, horses) in caravans. saffron, cochenil, manna and other goods, as well as products of local artisans – raw silk, silk and wool fabrics, carpets and carpet products, etc. [9, p.72].

Beginning in the 10th century the first signs of a renewed desire of non-Caspian states to penetrate and strengthen their position in this region in one way or another were observed. Thus, Kievan Rus maintained trade and political relations not only with the West, but also with the East, and according to academician V.V. Bartold, “it was precisely trade relations that brought the Russians closer to the peoples of the East” [10, p.72]. Long before the trade route “from the Varangians to the Greeks” began to function connecting the countries of northeastern Europe with Byzantium, in the 9th-10th centuries there was a Caspian-Baltic trade route connecting the northern and western countries with the East along the Volga. The main highway connecting the Rus with the East was the Volga-Caspian route and the main trade intermediary and transit point was the capital of the Khazar Khaganate, the city of Itil (from the 12th century – the city

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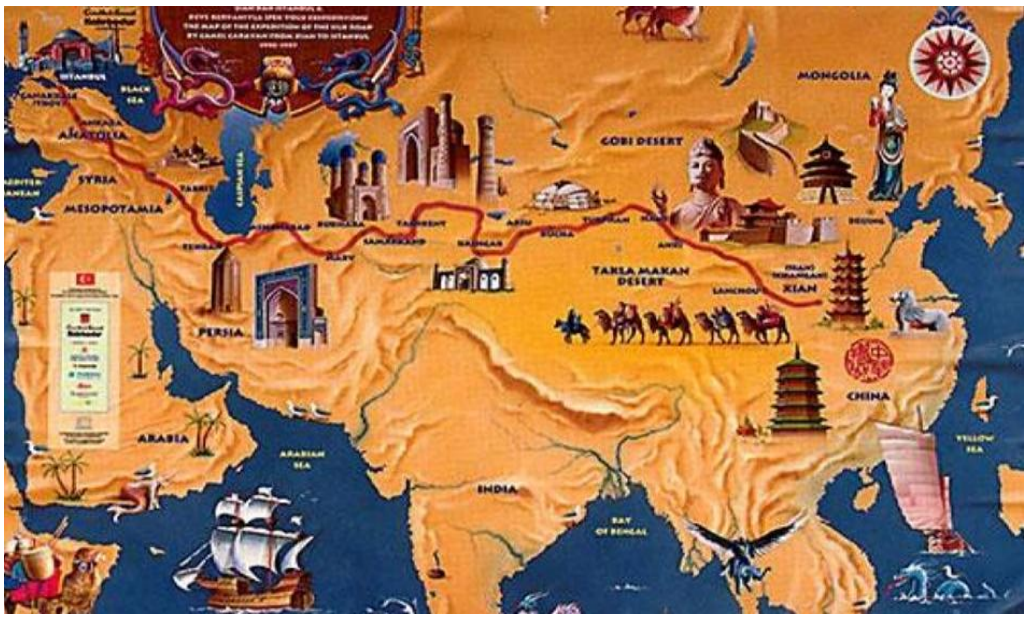
of Saksin), located at the mouth of the Volga. It was through this city that trade was conducted between the countries of South-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, Iran and especially with Central Asia [11, p.30-31]. During this period, the Rus conducted trade with countries located on the southern and western coasts of the Caspian Sea. They went down the Tanais (Don), were dragged to the Volga, then sailed along it to the capital of the Khazar Khaganate where they were taxed 10% of the value of their goods and sailed further on their ships along the Caspian Sea [9, p.73].




**The caravan route from China and India through Central Asia to the Caspian Sea along the Great Silk Road. Middle Ages.**

The 9th-11th centuries are characterized by the desire of Kievan Rus to emerge and gain a foothold in the south – on the coasts of the Black, Azov and Caspian Seas. Almost simultaneously with the Rus' campaigns across the Black Sea, their river and sea vessels also appeared on the Caspian Sea. Gradually, the Rus' mastered another main trade waterway, almost parallel to the first - from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea via Novgorod and Kyiv. It went from the Caspian Sea up the Volga and, on the one hand, through the Oka-Volga interfluve, reached the Baltic Sea and on the other running along the Kama and further along the Northern Dvina, to the White Sea [12, p. 3-4].

In addition to the river routes which extended approximately in a meridional direction, there were several other trade routes that ran approximately parallel. Such was, for example, the route from the mouth of the Dnieper around Crimea to the Sea of Azov, then up the Don, along the portage to the Volga and further to the Caspian Sea. Eastern merchants ascended from the Caspian Sea up the Volga, while Russian merchants, in turn, penetrated the Caspian along the Don and Volga and reached its southern borders. As in the Black Sea, peaceful trade relations in the Caspian were often interrupted by raids and wars with the aim of consolidating certain trade advantages. Moreover, if the Khazars who had devastated the shores of the Caspian Sea, did not have ships, the Rus had them in sufficient quantity. The first sea campaign of the Rus' on the Caspian Sea mentioned by Arab sources took place in 880 when they attacked the coast of Tabaristan and the city of Abeskun.

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**The Caucasus-Caspian region on a medieval Chinese map**

In 909, they made a new campaign into this region on 16 ships and captured the cities of Abeskun and Makale (Mian-Kale) in the Gulf of Astrabad. In 910, the Rus attacked Sari, Dailem, Gilan and the adjacent coast [13, p.10]. In 912-913 there was a large campaign of the Rus from the mouth of the Dnieper through the Black and Azov Seas to the mouth of the Don having ascended which, they transported their boats to the Volga and descended into the Caspian Sea. According to Mas'udi, the number of their ships reached 500, each containing a hundred warriors [14, p.76]. During this campaign, the Rus managed to come to an agreement with the Khazar khan, to whom they agreed to give half of the future booty in exchange for unhindered passage to the Volga and the Caspian. Having chosen an island in the Baku region as their base, they made raids from there on the southern and southwestern coast of the Caspian Sea – Gilan, Deylem, Tabaristan, Abeskun.

According to the testimony of the same Mas'udi, the success of the Rus was facilitated by the fact that “the peoples living on the shores of this sea were confused, since in previous times they had not seen the enemy attack them from the sea and only the ships of merchants and fishermen sailed along it” [14, p. 76]. During this period, the Shirvanshahs, possessing a fairly large and well-armed army, did not have a navy and only merchant ships sailed along the Caspian Sea. However, despite such a successful start, on the whole this campaign of the Rus ended in failure, since on their return they were attacked first by the Khazars, and then, retreating in boats up the Volga, they were defeated by the Volga Bulgars. Another major campaign of the Rus to the Caspian took place in 943-944. This time they succeeded in sailing up the Kura River and capturing the city of Barda, but they were unable to hold out there for long and soon returned. In 1030, the Rus' again attacked Baku on 38 ships [14, p.87].

It should be noted that these Russian campaigns stimulated naval construction in the state of the Shirvanshahs. In the 12th century, under Shirvanshah Akhsitan I /1160-1196/, a fleet consisting of several dozen ships was created and in Baku Bay in the first half of the 13th century. The sea fortress of Sabail was built, which became the naval base of the local fleet. These measures made it possible to successfully repel another attack from the sea by the Rus in 1175, and their flotilla, consisting of 73 ships, was defeated [15, p. 27-28, 32; 16, p. 47]. Meanwhile, the grandiose Mongol conquests of the first half of the 13th century remade the entire political map of Eurasia and the Middle East, and their effects were felt in world history for several centuries to come. However, even after this period, when all the lands from Eastern Europe to China

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became part of the Eurasian empire of Chingiz Khan and a new trade route was formed from Europe through Russia and the Golden Horde to China, the ancient southern highway running from China through Central Asia, Persia and Azerbaijan to the West did not lose its its meaning. At the end of the 13th – beginning of the 14th centuries, international trade in the Caspian basin expanded significantly, with maritime trade experiencing great development. Beginning from this period, Genoese and Venetian merchants, whose ships sailed on the Black Sea, established their factories on the shores of the Caspian Sea and even sailed their merchant ships along it. The main item of international trade during this period became Gilan and Shemakha silks. In this regard, the importance of Baku as the most convenient port on the Caspian Sea increases even more. This was noted in the medieval Catalan atlas, compiled in 1375, in which the Caspian Sea itself was called the Baku Sea and this name was popular among Europeans in subsequent centuries [9, p. 118]. Until the end of the 14th century. Silk and silk fabrics, carpets, spices and other goods from the countries adjacent to the Caspian Sea were exported through Baku and Derbent to Astrakhan, the Golden Horde, Russia and Europe, mainly to Italy and France. The goods were sent through the Baku port to Astrakhan, then along the Volga and Don, and from there Venetian merchants transported them on their galleys along the Sea of Azov to Europe. However, after the capture of Astrakhan by Timur (1370-1405) in 1395, this trade route changed and eastern goods were sent to Europe via Persia and Syria [9, p. 119]. Having taken control of vast territories of Western Asia, through which most of the caravan routes ran, Timur sought to establish control over these routes of European-Asian trade and thereby strengthen his position here. It is no coincidence that in his letter to the Turkish Sultan Ildrym Bayazid I /1389-1402/ Timur reported his intention to ensure the safety of trade routes [17, p. 7]. In order to completely monopolize the European-Asian trade in his hands, Timur sought to destroy the trading centers located on the northern caravan routes that ran through the Black Sea and Caspian steppes - Urgench, Sarai, Berke, Azov, etc. [18, p. 331]. In the 15th century, during the period of the existence of the Karakoyunlu and Akkoyunlu states in the south of Azerbaijan, and the Shirvanshahs in the north, caravan routes, in comparison with the previous period, become safer. "The best silk" (I. Shiltberger) - Shirvan silk was in great demand in Asia Minor, Persia, Syria, Italy [19, p. 33, 41]. During this same period, the role of Tabriz in the international caravan trade increased even more, which was associated with the destruction of Astrakhan and Baghdad by Timur [20, p. 67; 21, p. 163, 168]. In general, by the middle of the 15th century, the Caspian region, through which the main caravan routes ran, connecting India, China and Central Asia with the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins, as well as the Persian Gulf with the Volga khanates and the Moscow state began to play one of the key roles in international trade between Asia and Europe.

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The Caspian Sea on the European map of the 15th century.

The situation in this region changed radically after the establishment of the Ottoman state on the territory of the former Byzantine Empire in the middle of the 15th century.

With the emergence of the powerful Ottoman Empire and strong Azerbaijani states - Ak Koyunlu from the middle of the 15th century, and then from the beginning of the 16th century - the Safavid state, the military-strategic situation in the Caucasus-Caspian region changed radically. This region becomes one of the key elements in the relations between Asia and Europe, which during this period acquired the character of a military-political confrontation.

Already in the 70-80s of the 15th century, the struggle for control of the main transit routes and the main centers of international trade acquired primary significance in the military-political relations between the state of Ak Koyunlu and the emerging Ottoman Empire. The capture of Constantinople (1453) and Trabzon (1461) by the troops of Sultan Mehmet II /1451-1481/ and the increase in trade duties caused enormous damage to European-Asian trade. Under these conditions, European merchants, mainly Venetians, sought new trade routes with the East, bypassing the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, Venice, which monopolized all Eastern European trade, sought to take advantage of the aggravation of relations between Turkey and Ak Koyunlu. This is what led to the establishment of close trade and diplomatic relations between Uzungol Hasan (1453-1478) and the Venetian Republic in the second half of the 15th century. Things reached the point where Venice managed to get the Ak Koyunlu state to enter the war against the Ottoman Empire in 1472-1473. Uzungol's army was supposed to break through to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where ships from Venice and other European countries were supposed to arrive with a large contingent of firearms and artillery specialists. However, neither the Venetian Republic nor other European countries – members of the anti-Ottoman coalition – the Papacy, the Neo-Political Kingdom, the German Empire, Poland, Hungary were able to oppose the Ottoman Empire at the same time as Ak Koyunlu. In turn Sultan Mehmet II having outpaced his opponents, finally conquered the only military-strategic point on the Mediterranean coast - Karaman, where the army of Uzungol Hasan could unite with the troops of Venice and other European states. Although Uzungol's army managed to break through to the Mediterranean coast in the region of Karaman in 1472, his European allies,

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and first of all Venice, did not provide effective support at the decisive moment, in particular with their naval forces. Uzungol-Hasan's second attempt to break through and gain a foothold on the Mediterranean coast, undertaken in 1473 also ended in failure. On the whole, the attempt to create an anti-Ottoman European-Ak Koyunlu coalition during this period ended in failure, primarily due to the diplomatic maneuvers of Venice which, at the very height of the Ak Koyunlu-Ottoman war, began secret negotiations with the Sublime Porte, with the aim of taking advantage of the initial successes of their ally, they wrested trade privileges from the Ottoman Sultan peacefully [22, p. 83-103]. Venice did not have to wait long for the consequences of these events. As a result of the war of 1499-1502, the Ottoman Empire having dealt a heavy blow to the superiority of Venice in the Mediterranean, itself turned into a fairly strong maritime power.

Conclusion

Thus, the Middle Ages marked the intensification of military and political rivalry in the Caucasus-Caspian region for control over the Caspian route. Beginning in the 10th century, the first signs of a renewed desire of non-Caspian states to penetrate and strengthen their positions in this region by one means or another were observed. The situation in this region changed radically after the establishment of the Ottoman state on the territory of the former Byzantine Empire in the mid-15th century. With the emergence of the powerful Ottoman Empire and strong Azerbaijani states – Ak Koyunlu, and then the Safavid state from the beginning of the 16th century, the Caucasus-Caspian region became one of the key elements in the relations between Asia and Europe which during this period acquired the character of a military-political confrontation.

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