

## **An Overview on the basis of Urban Planning and Social Life of Safavid Cities**

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### **Abstract**

In the Safavid era, cities played a decisive role in the activities of urban social life, especially with regard to commodity, distribution and exchanging system between urban and rural society as well as defining the role of organizations in the commercial process. This paper is based on historical analyzing method where the authors could utilize primary sources to study social and economic states of urban life in Persian cities during Safavid. Farah Abad, Isfahan and Bandar Abbas in North, Center and South of Iran have been examined. These cities were selected considering their functional nature as producer, industrial (processor) and exporter centers.

The outcome of the study shows that the cities founded and developed during Safavid, specially on Silk Road, during the reign of Shah Abbas I (996-1038 AH), played the role of producer, distributor and exporter in north, center and south of Iran. Based on their functional capacities, cities of that era are divided into three types: producer of raw materials, intermediary and processing, and finally exporter (port) cities. The analysis of economic relations of those cities indicates that the king had despotic monopolization of all aspects of the cities where the urban economy deeply on agricultural economy of countryside.

**Keywords:** Islamic Cites; Financial Relations; Safavid Era; Silk Route; Economic unction.

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## Introduction

According to economic theories, variables and wealth resource distributions, in seventeenth century Europe, were known as factors for the rapid growth of historical cities. Cities, in accordance with wealth earning and production, belonged to specific social classes. This was such an important indicator that the division of architectural spaces in cities were determined based on economic power where different services were provided to social classes (Karimian, 2004:111-121). This theory was manifested in Iran during Islamic era when cities were converted into a place for social participation in economic sectors; and that on the other hand resulted into social force division, exchange relations and development commercial system (Yusefifar, 2007:277-279). These had effective stimulus to found ports, trade and generally in the cities with economic function.

Safavid cities, as the most important place of social, political and economic changes, are the most important for researchers to focus on principles, concepts, thoughts and functions of society and government. Organizing sects and religious fractions, bureaucracy, guilds and establishing commercial network, military system are all the result of the phenomenon which is called city, a place that indicated the authority of Safavid Kings to legitimize their political and religious power.

For the first time, Safavid Iran could establish the financial institution at national and international levels (Guodarzi, 2009:342). To activate native commerce and rapid growth of international trade, cities were founded and developed as producer, industrial and exporter, to implement Safavid kings' economic policies in the best way.

In this research, Farah Abad, Isfahan and Bandar Abbas in north, central and south of Iran are examined to study the role and position of cities during Safavid, by utilizing social and economic studies on urban as well as by analyzing the historical method. These three cities were selected giving their producing, industrial and exporting capacities. The main research question is: How functional cities play their role through foreign and domestic trade in Safavid Iran, especially during Shah Abbas?

In this research, Safavid cities are evaluated through previous social and economic studies as well as primary materials. The compiling methods are based on library studies which are the primary sources (general and regional histories) and geography (itineraries) as well as the contemporary researches.

## Safavid Cities: Political or Commercial?

In general, the geographical distribution during Safavid is attributed to kings' policy. This resulted in functionalism which is the base and priority of city planning. Safavid kings decided to implement their political, economic and social policies by founding and, in many cases, developing urban complex next to old textures. Since, palatial distribution could be followed up explicitly, ports and coastal cities in northern Iran such as Farah Abad and Mashhadsar (present Babolsar), Bandar Abbas in south, mountainous cities of Ardabil, Tabriz and Sanandaj in west and north-west, desert cities as Isfahan, Kashan and Yazd were founded and, in some cases, developed for specific political, economic and social (religious) aims.

The distribution and spatial arrangement of commercial cities in the

Safavid era put them in three categories i.e. producer of raw materials, industrial (intermediary and processing) and exporter. This pattern of spatial arrangement was manifested by silk trade especially through the commercialization of Iran during Shah Abbas I. The producer or northern cities grew silk worms. The second groups were industrial cities such as Isfahan, Kashan and Yazd where raw materials (silk) were converted into textile commodities i.e. carpet and cloth woven at workshops. In such cities, workshops could produce the most important silk-based export commodities for examples brocaded carpets and luxury clothes. During Safavid, those workshops were divided into governmental and native (regional) sectors. The government-controlled workshops were called Royal Possession Land (Byutat-e-Saltanati). According to Tavernier, those workshops were located between Chehel Sotun Palace and Maidan-i-Shah (Shah Square):

*'....there is a vast yard belonging to Royal Possession Land (Byutat-e-Saltanati) where at the corner, weaving machine(loom) is settled to weave brocaded by silk and gold for King'( Tavernier,1985.386).*

It should be mentioned that eight out of thirty-three main guilds cooperated with cloth-weaving guild (Minorskiy, 1990: 123-126). In general, luxury carpets were not only woven for mosques and palace but were also sent to different countries such as Ottoman and Uzbek kings as gifts and exported, too. These cities played the role of intermediary and retail in urban economy. Final stage was ports and export cities in southern Iran from where commodities were exported, imported and transported. It is important to mention that

ports in the north of Iran were also capable of this process but limited to the export to Tsarist Russia since large amounts of exchanging as well as the target market were located in the south.

The implementation of aforementioned royal policy resulted in commercializing vast parts of the country. Also, activating the north-south road and inactivating east-west overland arterial road led to decreasing of Ottoman's political and economic pressure on Safavids. Undoubtedly, in implementing this policy, serious cooperation of British and Dutch companies in south as well as Portuguese's absolute trade seclusion and Safavid king's foreign policy on new economic ways are indisputable (Taghavi 2010: 59-60). Urban activities, in middle centuries Iran, were implement in the way that raw materials were sent from effective district ,which usually were countryside's, to cities and specific commodities were produced there. Then products could enter into the distribution cycle and flow of purchase and sale within inner or outer urban economy. Another economic function of cities was related to productive forces that were active in agricultural sector (Yusefifar, 2012:104). The other urban economic relation was concentrating on monopolization and possessory exploitation of forced labor on farms (Savory, 1384:194; Roymer, 2006: 232) and through the land reforming policy (converting Mamalik-state funds- to Khadssa-crown revenues)(Navaei and Qaffarifard, 2003:289), omitting intermediaries and direct purchasing by the king, an enormous productive capital of this sector were transferred to the court treasury.

### Farah Abad Urban Complex

The historical city of Farah Abad is located in a rural setup by the same name: at a distance of three kilometers from Mazandaran Sea, 25 kilometers from Sari. Network of roads was one of the important factors that played an effective role in developing Farah Abad spaces. Shah Abbasid road, as the most important and strategically located in the region, created a peaceful and safer way between northern cities and southern regions of Alborz mountain range. In fact, this road started from Isfahan and ended in Farah Abad in Sari. Shah Abbasid road passed through Isfahan, Kashan, Khar and Firoozkooch and after 45km reached Pol-e-sefid. Then reached Zirab, Shirgah and near countryside of Azadgaleh ended in Farah Abad. This road was built on the order of Shah Abbas himself in 1031A.H under the supervision of Mirza Mohammad Taqi Khan-e-Mazandarani (Sarootaqi) (Torkaman, 1999:768-770). Although Alborz mountain were difficult to pass, many rivers, forests and swamps were natural obstacles in building road networks, but Shah Abbas's long-term strategies and goals for economic development made it possible. So, Iran's northern regions - from Gaskar to Astar Abad were connected to center by Shah Abbasid road. Population reform was done because of suitable environmental space. As in 1023 A.H, Shah Abbas ordered Armenians, Georgians and Kurds to be emigrated from northwest parts of Iran and Caucasian region to Farah Abad, Astar Abad, Barforoush and other Northern cities (Torkaman, 1999: 881). The immigrated labor force achieved one-tenth of national silk product by growing silk worm. (ibid, 1999: 564) during this time, the amount of silk product was 2484000 kilogram's in

Mazandaran and Gilan province which was 65% of Khadssa produced silk. (Navidi, 2008:169). This resulted in developing economic bases and ports as Farah Abad, Barforoush, Mashhad Sar, Astar Abad in Northern Province of Iran. Because of structural changes, the atmosphere of northern cities converted from a pleasure area for Safavid kings and court to active ones where commercial and trade relations were done with neighboring Tsarist Russia. The vast spatial space that Rabino believed was the largest plain in Mazandaran where the distance between mountain and sea reached at its highest level (17 acres) (Rabino, 2005: 25) was one of the important variables which made Farah Abad the capital rather than old Sari. Farah Abad, as a coastal town, played the main role in trade since Sari was a place of trade exchanges and also an intermediary city. On the other hand, Farah Abad which played the executive role in commercial affairs was in a suitable condition for storing, transferring and loading commodities and Sari was changed to a city because of its dense urban texture and lack of suitable space for implementing mentioned affairs. Delavalleh explained Farah Abad in his itinerary:

*'In 1027 this city , I mean Farah Abad, could be called half-port, because the little ships that move in Caspian Sea between Gilan and Mazandaran, Badkoubeh (present Baku, capital of Republic of Azerbaijan), Mirqapuo and a little farther in Hashtarkhan as well as transfer commodity; are able come to central Tejen bridge and berth next to it. He mentioned ships are the same as central Tejen bridge boats in their cities which come on a higher level than water and but*

*their bottom didn't go so down because of sea shallow.'* (Delavalleh, 1992:144).

This is applied to Barforoush (present Babol). As if Mashhadsar (the present Babolsar) played the same role as Farah Abad. As mentioned before, forced migration of the minority Armenians, Kurds, Georgians and the residents of Shirvan and Qarebaq in Azerbaijan into suitable and examined places for growing silkworm, was one of the Shah Abbas I's economical actions which resulted in reducing their destructive power in organizing rebellions and tribal insurrections and also utilizing their ability to develop the economy of new founded cities. Also, the forced migration policy led to population changes and speeded up organizing new combined population and multi-cultural society. One of the most famous ones is the forced migration of Shirvan and Qarebaq's tribes in Azerbaijan which happened in 1023AH. In the same year, a 15000 population which was the combination of Jewish, Muslims and Armenian, were forced to migrate from Mazandaran (Torkaman, 1999: 881). These tribes were accused of having close relations with Ottomans and uprising in western border of Iran hence; they were exiled to Farah Abad and Ashraf-al-Belad to prevent probable riot and their force and also increase the population in these cities. Delavalleh says about this minority and their activities:

*"Armenians, who knew about growing vine, were given farm and related instruments, Georgians and other Christian and Jewish were growing silk worm in the suburb of Farah Abad with a wealth of berry trees, because they*

*were familiar with this skill. Azerbaijanis of Shirvan who are very lazy had to work and were forced to make silk."* (Delavalleh, 1999: 174).

Necessity to explain that Ashraf-al-Belad city has been one of the important political centers in the Safavid era. It determined strategic city for Farah Abad urban complex. Ordering and placement of micro-complex or half-independent in the spatial organization of the city are in such a way that parts of the remaining spaces such as mosques and palace as well as reconstructed ones such as squares and bazars, are located in the central core of the city (Fig.1). The spatial analysis of the city's core elaborates that in this part mosque, palace and bazar were in a direction with a linear order which shows the effect of logic and cosmic thoughts of Isfahan's city planning. In the first form - logic- the appearance of elements were based on needs of society and the government, and in the latter spatial arrangement were in accordance with spirituality and teachings of Iranian-Islamic mysticism. At the beginning, the central core of Farah Abad started with main mosque- and its school-mosque's function- in southern part of the city, then the rectangular main square -in an organic form- and also bazar and shops on the two sides of the square, were located and then it ended to Jahan-Nama palace in the north of the city. It is important to know that a steady and logical form of the concept of space was inspired in this complex by partial hierarchy by considering of elements as symmetry, balance and entrances lobby in each part (Karimian & Taghavi, 2011: 126-129).

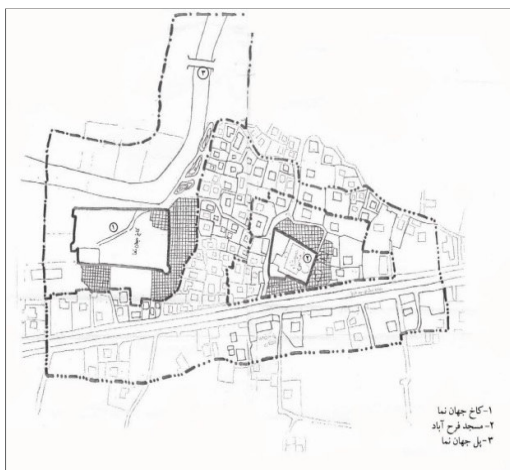


Fig.1. Urban Spaces of Farah Abad in Safavid era (Karimian & Taghavi, 2011: 129)

The extroversion of Jahan-Nama palace, its divisions to public and private sections and their differentiation level, show the authority and control over the area. This would be real when one imagines the palace with Tejen River view with its beautiful scenery. In a comparison between the plan of Naqsh-e-Jahan square in Isfahan and Farah Abad square, it is inferred that the Farah Abad square was somewhat similar to Naqsh-e-Jahan's in construction and providing necessary space to arrange and organize half-dependent elements, but ten years later. In Farah Abad square, mosque and palace were next to each other. Bazaar of the city, as in Naqsh-e-Jahan in Isfahan, was organized around the square of the complex, too. Archeological evidences and written records show that there were no specialized bazars as Qeysarieh, copper smiting and various other jobs as well as commercial exchanges. So, Farah Abad, harbor and constructed installations played direct roles in trade and export.

Generally, Farah Abad had the main factors of spatial organization of Safavid

cities. Also according to evidences as documents, analysis of aerial pictures and remaining signs could infer that the city is constructed on the basis of urbanization and architectural pattern of Isfahan School. As main elements of urban planning in this era are mosque, bazaar and palace, they were constructed symmetrical and in a spatial hierarchical way. It should be mentioned that these factors resulted in the division of city into royal and public sections. The royal city has a central core which is consisted of Jahan-Nama palace with public halls, garden, harem and private halls and also main square with bazar, mosque-school, governmental bath, church (?), Doulat Khanih (?) and barracks. Although, each part makes micro-complexes and gives meaning to the complex, Tejen River divides the city into two mentioned parts. The public sector was one of the main structures of the city, located on the north-eastern part in which there were various quarters with the majority of people as farmers, shopkeepers, traders from different minority groups.

### Isfahan

Undoubtedly, it is complicated and time-consuming to analyze the signs and spaces of cities in Safavid Isfahan in details. However, an enormous research with different views on this city led to wealth of information. In this part, the authors' aim is to evaluate architectural elements, the type of texture distribution and urban life in Isfahan during Shah Abbas I, by the means of a short glance on the process of organizing and developing the core of city. Hence, in this part, elements aren't described as a case and also not to analyze in detail and instead, its general architectural characteristics are examined

in the culture and appearance context of the city. The most important reasons which resulted in relocating the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan in 1006 A.H. were Shah Tahmasp I's death and its outcomes that were people's uprisings, feudal Qezelbashs and continual losing in wars against Ottomans and Uzbeks as well as natural disasters such as destructive flood and famines. In fact, Shah Abbas I's reign (996-1038H) is known as the second stage of Safavid's urban planning in which the attention was paid to develop physical urban texture, establishing urban complex besides social and economic activities as a principal in most cities in this era. A group of scholars believe that the reasons of singling out this city as the capital had their roots in various factors: geographical factors (fertile plain and sufficient water resources as Zayande-rud) (Urojbeyk, 1338. 259), economic factors (converting the trade road from east-west to north-south), long distance from enemies (Ottomans and Uzbeks) (Lockhart, 2005:413), reducing Qezelbashs' force in power structure, prohibiting different opinions and struggle between political and religious groups (Monajjem Yazdi, 1360:131), securing residents' life and property against natural disasters as seasonal flood and earthquake. But authors believe the reason for singling out Isfahan is that this city -as one of the industrial ones- besides an economic intermediary was an important passage in the cycle of foreign trade via the new trade road from north to south of Iran. During Shah Abbas, Isfahan was converted to one of the leading cities in economy by changing the way of silk trade, which had been eastern-western, and affected on national and international changes in politic, economy and social life. It is evidenced by European travelers'

itineraries (Delavalleh, 1999:35-36; Figueroa, 1985:211; Kampfer, 1363:185). For certain, the glory and physical development of Isfahan took place in Shah Abbas I's reign. Changing the triple traditional construction- Arc, Sharistan, Rabaz- of early and middle Islamic centuries to a new construction in an urban complex form was the most important alteration in physical appearance of cities during the Safavid era. These complexes made the central core of this era's cities in an organic form. The separation of residential quarters in accordance with tribe, job and religion and their centralization were shown a peaceful and symbiotic relationship among various social classes. During this era, the core of the city was established (1011A.H) around a square which was called Naqsh-e-Jahan, in South-Western part of Saljuq old city (Gaubeh, 1987: 290). The main constituent elements in this square are comprised of Shah (Imam) Mosque at the southern part, Ali-Qapu palace at the western part, Sheykh Lotf-Allah Mosque at the eastern part, rest of bazaar and Gate of Qeysarieh at the northern part (Fig. 2). Qeysarieh bazaar was utilized in northern part, as a connective element between the Old main mosque (Atiq) at Old Square and the main constructed mosque at square, to encourage people in making use of new city. Hence, the economic focal point of the city was gravitated to the new square and resulted in develop this area of the new city. The large number of caravanserais around the Naqsh-e-Jahan square which played the role of impermanent wharf, led to increasing economic flourishing of the complex. In fact, Qeysarieh bazaar, besides other elements of royal and religious architecture, had been known as the symbol of Isfahan urban economy in Shah

Abbas's reign (Blake, 1999:115). In addition to the economic function of Naqsh-e-Jahan square, the aspects of social and political function are important since many foreign ambassadors and representatives were received at Ali-Qapu palace. Celebrating national events such as Nourooz, attending polo and being the place of wrestling were other social functions of this square. In a general definition, Naqsh-e-Jahan square, as the royal performance of Shah Abbas's political and economic power, is interpreted by an obvious form and architectural elements, mosque, bazaar and palace (Briniuli. 2007:65). It could be concluded from studies on physical appearance of Isfahan that the Safavid urban-planning is in accordance with the tradition of Islamic urban-planning in which three aspects of human life that is spirituality, life and aristocracy (political power), has been shown by mosque, bazaar and palace as the main constituent elements of urban texture. The king's second main action on the urban-planning in Isfahan was the construction and development of Chahar-Bagh Street. It had the same spatial and physical functions of Qazvin Street in Shah Tahmasp's reign. The theaters were performed in Chahar-Bagh Street besides helping people to pass their spare time, would prepare the ground for providing the sense of unity and integrity by the first national independent government in Iran (Chardein, 1335: 134-135). Uncommon size of street in length and utilizing four rows of green.

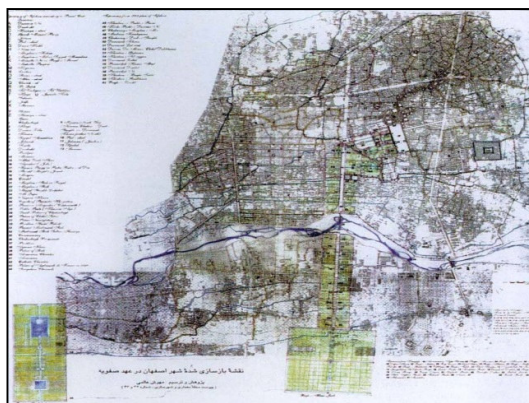


Fig.2. Isfahan in Safavid Period (Gaubeh,1987:295)

The complex of Safavid palaces in Isfahan is another element of urban physical appearance which is characterized in two forms: royal palace (kings' residence, place of receiving ambassadors and foreign guests) and residential palaces (king and royal family's permanent residence). The structural nature of them shows completely two different functions. First group of palaces, with octagonal plans, were rather extrovert and manifested by locating in a vast area, mostly around Chahar-Bagh.

Urban relations of Isfahan in the Safavid era under the political governing in organizing the new urban complex beside old texture of Seljuq era, indicate that Isfahan is fiat city. The tradition of endowment (waqf) which developed the urban physical appearance in Shah Abbas's reign, led to the activity in urban life and providing facilities and services to all citizens by constructing mosques, baths and drinking foundation (Saqqā Khaneh).

### Bandar Abbas

One of the important changes during Shah Abbas I (996-1038 A.H.) was the conquest



of Hormuz and the defeat of Portuguese on the southern island of Iran in 1031 A.H. (Vosooqi, 1384: 273). Falling of Hormuz, above all, was the sign of decline in specific distribution system which was based on total utilizing and supporting the exchange process of commodity around the world. So, the fall of Portuguese's forts and the control over of companies around vast part of trade in Europe and Asia were taken place at the same time that decreased the Persian Gulf trade but didn't prevent it completely. In other words, Iran remained important in international trade even after the fall of Hormuz. Although European companies initially had decided to gain from silk trade but after a short time they realized Iran's transit location and did their best to connect with Iran and utilize all its capacities (Steensgaard, 1974:398). This led to the exit of Hormuz Island from Iran's sea trade cycle hence; Bandar Abbas was substituted as the focal point of sea exchanges for 120 years. Bandar Abbas already was a small countryside with population of 200; called Gambron, that Imam Qoli Khan-Fars governor- conquered it in 1022 A.H. This small countryside was progressed by Shah AbbasI's supports and Imam Qoli Khan's sagacity by a short span of time. In 1031 A.H, Imam Qoli Khan wrote a letter to one of the British agents in which this was named as Bandar-e-Abbasi (Abbasieh), the first title instead of Gambron (Vosooqi, 2010:114). Gambron is located in the three countryside of "Soroo", "Nakhoda" and Bander so it is demanding to determine its right placement among them. In early Islamic centuries' scripts is mentioned a port by the name of "Soroo" or "Shahroo" which were located on the trade route of Hormuz to Kerman and Shiraz (Istakhri,1368:145, Moqadasi,1984:638). Bandar probably was

a place that would have named as Gamron or Gambron (Nikitin, 1960:109). During Shah Abbas I, this place was described by itineraries and historians as countryside with a mosque and one hundred population as well as poor people and houses made by cane and reed (Newberier, 1905: 456-460; Teixiera, 1970:209). Main economic and population exchanges began as soon as Hormuz fell hence; all population and trade facilities were transferred to the new port. Pietro Delavalleh, the Italian tourist, writes about the new port of Abbasi months after the conquest of Hormuz:

*"We arrived Gambron twenty –first of Septembers on Wednesday. A vast and populated area on the coast which its name changed because of changing its possessor. People from different nationality gathered there. Besides Muslims and a wealth of local Jewish, many Indian idolater and follower of other fractions live there"* (Delavalleh.26-1226).

Seven years after the conquest of Hormuz, Sir Thomas Herbert knew this port as a multi-national city where traders thronged from different parts of the world such as England, Portugal, the Netherlands, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, Ottoman, Indian and Arabic lands. He believed that international trade was the reason for the flourishing of this port. Herbert had estimated the port population about one-thousand families and described bazaar and urban constructions compellingly (Herbert, 1928:41-49). Considering precious experience of designers and architectures of the Safavid era, implementing planned policy for urban development of "Bandar-e-Abbasi" is expected. The quality of forms of locating

buildings and beautiful scenes in this port is so excellent those eighteen years after the revival of this port, a European tourist wrote:

*“...Bandar-e-Abbasi, the city in which only eighteen families lived during my initial visit, is now the largest city and on a trade scale is similar to the best city of England, as it couldn't be found a similar city all around the Asia (Boothy, 1647:43-44).”*

These evidences elaborate that progress and development was carried out by the means of special planning and supervising as well as all installations and necessary building were constructed to convert it into a main transit port in a limited period of time. The sudden increase of urban population made officials to supply daily needs, especially drinking water and, at the beginning, decided to construct some underground cisterns. Then, the instruments of carrying the water provided from neighboring areas as “Abbasid”, “Isin” and “Naband” so the water problem was solved. A large amount of daily needs as fruit, vegetables and meat provided from Qeshm island (LeBruyn, 1737: 75; Thevont, 1686: 137). Despite inappropriate placement and inexpedient choosing in altering the trade center from Hormuz to Bandar-e-Abbasi, it converted to the focal point of trade exchanges of the Persian Gulf in less than 14 years as well as an international trade city, the mystery and symbol of Iranian existence in regional and international trade.

### Conclusion

Safavid kings' economic expedients, especially that of Shah Abbas I, of foreign trade development resulted in flourishing

of regional and international trade. Economic function of cities played key role in developing urban, rural and pastoral economies which were the three important parts of the economic structure of the Safavid era. The natural state and climatic conditions (agricultural economy), locating on trade roads (exchange system) and existence of ports (exporter) resulted in that Safavid cities create a new network of exchanging commodity organization at national and international levels by utilizing territorial possession and potential of sea and overland road ways. Here, the king, local elites, Armenian traders and foreign companies were the main elements in this trade cycle. The structure of the economy in the Safavid era shows king's special and authoritative control over production to export processes. As, the king implemented constructive encouraging policies to gain profit i.e. processing products (sumptuous silk carpets) land reform (converting Mamalik and Khadssa to Khalisi-crown land), monopoly of silk trade against European countries. It could be mentioned that to varying forms of commerce, king gave the duty of national marketing to Iranian and Jewish, international marketing to Armenians in silk trade and he himself, as a supervisor, controlled the process of the trade. The conclusion of the studies on the role of these cities in production, distribution and consumption of commodities indicate that Shah Abbas I made a network of retail system of agricultural products which was under king's monopoly. The mechanism of trading especially silk trade in this era acted in a way that all silk-growers must sell their products to Shah Abbas's office-holder in trade affairs' called Vizir (Prime Minister). Shah Abbas purchased silk from

possessor in half-valued which other customers such as Armenian of Isfahan did, then he sold the silk to Iranian and foreign traders in a value which he determined himself. The Safavid king's

possessory exploitation as well as despotic monopolization vanished during Shah Safi and with other factors prepared the ground for the downfall of functional cities.

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## نگرشی بر مبانی شهر سازی و حیات اجتماعی در شهرهای عصر صفوی

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در ایران عصر صفوی، این مساله با تعریفی سازمان یافته از نظام تولید، توزیع و مبادله میان جامعه شهری و روستایی و تبیین سازمان اداری فرایند تجارت، هرکدام نقشی تعیین کننده در پویایی حیات اجتماعی شهر داشته‌اند. پژوهش حاضر بر اساس روش تحلیل تاریخی و بهره‌گیری از منابع تاریخی و مطالعات اجتماعی و اقتصادی شهر، با هدف تبیین ساختار اقتصادی شهرهای ایران در عصر صفوی نگاشته شده است. به همین منظور برای شناخت منطقی و مستند از تحولات رخ داده، شهرهای فرح آباد در شمال، اصفهان در مناطق مرکزی و بندرعباس در جنوب ایران به عنوان شهرهای شاخص، مورد مطالعه قرار گرفته اند. دلیل گزینش این شهرها بیشتر به دلیل ماهیت عملکردی آنهاست که به ترتیب شامل شهرهای تولیدی، صنعتی (فرآوری کننده) و صادرکننده دارای عملکرد بوده اند.

نتایج این تحقیق نشان می‌دهد که شهرهای ایران عصر صفوی در دو قالب شهرهای توسعه یافته و احداثی با پراکندگی مکانی خاصی در مسیر تجاری ابریشم در عصر سلطنت شاه عباس اول (۱۰۳۸-۹۹۶ق) در سه بخش شمالی، مرکزی و جنوبی ایران، به تولید، توزیع و صادرات کالا کارایی داشتند. بر حسب نظام تولید و مبادله رایج، شهرهای عملکردی عصر صفوی به سه گونه شهرهای تولید کننده مواد خام، واسطه‌ای یا فرآوری کننده و در نهایت صادر کننده (شهرهای بندری) تقسیم می‌شدند. تحلیل مناسبات اقتصادی شهرهای عصر صفوی نشان می‌دهد که اشکال ارائه شده در نظام مبادله بر جنبه‌های انحصارطلبی تام شاه و بهره کشی مالکانه، وابستگی شدید اقتصاد شهری به اقتصاد کشاورزی در روستاها و در نهایت شکل گیری نظام واسطه گری و خرده کالایی در شهرها تمرکز داشت.

واژگان کلیدی: شهر اسلامی، مناسبات اقتصادی، شهرهای صفوی، تجارت ابریشم، عملکرد اقتصادی.

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