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**2014-2015 TITLE VIII COMBINED RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE STUDY PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT**

*Caspian Connections: International Trade, Local Autonomy, and Imperial Expansion in the southern
Caspian, 1732 – 1828*

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Research Abstract:

A division exists within the literature on the rise of the Qajar state in Iran and the coming of Russian rule in the South Caucasus. Generally, scholarly works on these subjects may be divided between those reliant principally on Russian archival sources, and those based on Persian-language narrative texts. The former works, written by Russian and Soviet historians, have largely approached this period from the perspective of the development of the Russian economy, protection of Christian communities of the Caucasus, or Russian-Ottoman imperial rivalry. The latter works, by contrast, have primarily addressed questions of internal tribal politics and civil war in Iran. These contributions to the field have relied on texts produced in the major cities of the Iranian Plateau, taking the emphasis away from the Caspian littoral from which the Qajar state emerged.

My research aims to reconcile these two historiographic traditions and provide new insights into the emergence of a new Iranian state at the end of the eighteenth century, its conflict with the Russian Empire, and the fate of the South Caucasus' elites in the new regional balance of power. It seeks to demonstrate the interconnectedness of large regions of Eurasia during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through trade, and how these links enabled the creation of new political formations. To achieve these goals, I conducted research using primary source materials in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Deeds (RGADA), the Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA), and the State Library in Moscow, as well as the State Archive of Astrakhan Oblast (GAAO). These documents led

me to draw important conclusions about the role of regional autonomy in northern Iran, Shirvan (today's Republic of Azerbaijan), and Daghestan in the rise of both Qajar and Romanov power in the Caspian.

Research Goals:

The Title VIII fellowship allowed me an opportunity to receive language support and instruction in order to carry out archival research more effectively. For this reason, I took classes at International University in Moscow from November 2014 to April 2015, focusing on all aspects of the Russian language. This instruction proved especially useful for improving my knowledge of academic and scholarly forms of written language, which helped me to engage with Russian secondary literature in my field and to read the texts of original documents. Furthermore, I participated in weekly research consultations that helped me to identify important works in the field and to articulate and defend my findings in Russian.

Initially, I intended to focus my research on Armenian, Iranian, and Tatar trading networks operating in the Caspian Sea and trace the formation of communal identities among these groups. This research plan required extensive research in the archives in Astrakhan. However, the sources I encountered tend to portray the interests of the imperial Russian state more than merchant families themselves. For this reason, I slightly shifted the emphasis of my project toward a different social scale, looking at the interactions between local Shirvani and Iranian elites with Russian diplomatic representatives and merchants acting on their behalf.

For this reason, I chose to focus on the three most prominent post-Safavid states in the Caspian littoral in the post-Safavid period: Qoba-Derbent, Rasht (Gilan), and the Qajar rulers of Astarabad. Significantly, Enzeli and Salyan (under the control of Rasht and Qoba, respectively) were the locations of permanent Russian consulates from the 1730s. The presence of the consuls in these locations led to the production of a substantial source base that I used to examine the significance of Russian power and

trade to their rise to prominence in the region. I chose to define the chronological boundaries of the project widely, from the introduction of Russian power in the region and collapse of the Safavid state between 1716 and 1722, to the Treaty of Turkmanchai that ended the Russo-Persian Wars in 1828. However, this framework narrowed slightly, due to the importance of the Treaty of Rasht (1732) as the legal basis upon which these powers conducted their diplomatic relationships with Russia.

My research aims to treat each of these khanates individually, to analyze their degree of autonomy from authorities in Shiraz and the nature and significance of their connections with the Russian Empire. The importance of these regions to the formation of a new Iranian state and the confrontation between that state and St. Petersburg at the beginning of the nineteenth century has been largely overlooked, at the expense of a more conventional state-to-state mode of analysis. The Iranian-centered historiography has typically recognized that these regions lay outside the direct control of the Zand polity, though provided little information based on locally produced sources. Russian works have tended to contain much more detailed local histories, though focused on regions that came under Russian control by 1828, with an interest in examining their separation from Iran and evolution toward “unification” with Russia. Given the state of the field, I chose to approach these polities as parts of a more fluid Eurasian and post-Safavid context, without applying anachronistic territorial boundaries.

Research Activities:

I began my research in November after a brief delay caused by the difficulty of finding a visa sponsor and contacting the archive in Astrakhan. After my arrival in Moscow, I started by focusing on classes and gaining a higher level of comfort in the language before beginning primary source research. By the beginning of December, I started work in the Rare Books Section (Book Museum) of the State Library in Moscow. I read a number of significant texts in this collection, including historical accounts of Russian military and political activity in Iran and Central Asia, travelogues, and geographic works on the Caspian, all published during the second half of the eighteenth century. Additionally, I conducted

research in the dissertation collection of the State Library, located near the Rechnoi Vokzal metro station. This allowed me to examine the most recent work in the field of Russian imperial interest in the region and trade over the Caspian. I also worked with published monographs in the main collection of the Library, reading mostly Soviet-era works on the importance of Iran and Central in the development of the Russian domestic economy. Other works addressed the acquisition of new territories that comprised the republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan by the Empire.

By the end of December, I felt ready to beginning archival research with handwritten documents. I selected two archives in Moscow for this work. Despite to the continued closure of the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire, I was able to find alternative sources and copies of consular correspondence in the collections of RGADA and RGVIA. Because of ongoing renovations at RGVIA, I chose to work at RGADA first, while I waited for documents to become available at the other archive.

For the first two months, I worked primarily with documents from two collections, Fond 23 (Caucasian Affairs) and Fond 15 (Diplomatic Department). The former contained records presented to a committee that investigated the behavior of Russian diplomats during the Qajar conquest of Gilan Province in Iran in 1786. These materials included reports of the consul and political agents, petitions of merchants and Iranian landholders, correspondence between the consul and the local ruler, Hedayat-Allah Khan, descriptions of military and political developments in Iran, naval officers' reports, and testimony of various officials. This material fills important gaps in the available records of diplomatic correspondence for the period from the start of Qajar rule into the early 1790s. Additionally, documents in Fond 15 contained reports from representatives in Iran from the 1730s and letters of the Governors of Astrakhan on affairs in the region. During the long break for the winter holidays, I returned to the State Library, which remained open most days, to continue the work started during the previous month.

In February, I learned that my opportunity to work at RGVIA would be delayed by the full closure of the archive for several months; this disappointment was offset by the discovery of extensive collections of consular correspondence at RGADA. These documents belong to Fond 276, which holds all the records of the Commerce Collegium, to whom the consuls were required to report. The Collegium also appointed these representatives to their posts. I had been unaware of this collection, because of the many complicated layers of authority over diplomatic offices in the period. The consuls were simultaneously accountable to the Collegium of Foreign Affairs, to the Governor of Astrakhan, to Grigori Potemkin, and to the Commerce Collegium, each of which pursued their own interests and kept records now held in separate state archives. However, this proved to be the most important source of information to my research and occupied a large part of my remaining time in Moscow. In addition to consular correspondence, written between 1732 and 1788, the fond contains files on the status of trade in important commodities, efforts to prevent smuggling, and the economic activities of rival imperial powers in the region.

In late April, I chose to end my language courses, in order to dedicate my full time and attention to archival research. While I believe I would have benefitted from continued work in Russian, I felt competent in both written and spoken forms of the language to carry out my work and to communicate on a professional, academic level.

At the same time, I chose to take a short trip to Astrakhan to explore research opportunities in the regional archive. When I designed the project, I planned to work primarily in Astrakhan and supplement this with consular records from Moscow. I spent one working week in Astrakhan from April 19 to 24. On my first day in the city, I visited the archive and was given access to finding aids for six fonds. I chose these collections before arriving in Russia, but my search narrowed to official, state-produced records and away from documents relating to social history of the merchants. I made this decision because of my findings in Moscow and the changes made to my project because I was based

in the capital for most of my program. I found that the majority of these documents, including the governors' reports to central authorities, statistics on trade in the port of Astrakhan, and consular records were also sent to the Commerce Collegium, and were therefore also held at RGADA. I did access some records concerning individual merchants from the period, whom I discovered in the consular records acting in both commercial and diplomatic roles. These documents, which were held in Fond 394 (Astrakhan Governor Chancellory) and Fond 488 (Astrakhan Tatar Administration), deal with commercial practices and legal cases, and show the role of prominent merchants, including religious converts, as intermediaries across communal lines and in diplomatic exchanges. I was unable to find duplicates of these records in Moscow. However, the short time I had remaining to finish my studies in Russia and the large number of duplicates shared between Astrakhan and Moscow dictated that I should work mainly in the capital.

After a short break for the May holidays, I resumed work at RGADA and also began research at RGVIA, which reopened on May 18. At RGADA, I continued using *de la* from the Commerce Collegium, but also found more records in Fond 23, including reports from commanders on the North Caucasus Line of fortresses, concerning their relations with the Khanates between the Terek and Aras Rivers. At RGVIA, I worked with two fonds, 52 (Grigorii Potemkin papers) and 446 (Persia). Parts of the Potemkin collection are available at Yale, my home institution, on microfilm, but some of these documents were not available there. RGVIA only provided access to microfilms at the time, due to the renovations. For this reason, some records were still not available. However, while there is overlap, the Yale copies and RGVIA microfilms are not identical, so I was able to work with substantial amounts of new material. Additionally, Fond 446 contained diplomatic records from a later period than I found elsewhere and also focused on different regions, including the Turkmen steppe. It also contains travel accounts of military officers, which gave insights into Russian strategic thinking about the southern Caspian during the period. The pace of my research increased significantly at this time.

I continued to work on these collections through the end of July, when my emphasis shifted to identifying materials to copy. RGADA closed for the summer break on July 31, so I was only able to work there through the end of the month and needed to choose which remaining documents were most important to my project. I paid for their copying department to prepare high quality images of documents from Fond 15 and 276. These mostly included consular journals and letters in Persian or Turkish from rulers in the Caucasus, which were either damaged in the original or on the microfilm. The higher quality images made these easier to read during the month since I left Russia. In the last week of July, I also received the permission to photograph hundreds of pages from Fond 276 with my own camera, for a lower fee.

RVGIA remained open until August 14, so I was able to continue working through the end of my time in Moscow. However, the copying department closed early, so I was not able to purchase additional documents. I did manage to read through most of the relevant microfilmed materials from the fonds I'd chosen, but the unavailability of original copies means I'll need to make a short trip back to finish my work in the archive when all of its sources are accessible.

Research Findings:

Throughout the course of the eighteenth century, the actions of both Russian and Iranian political leadership helped to change the Caspian Sea from a barrier to commercial and diplomatic contact into an internally connected region. Russian efforts to prevent Ottoman access to the Caspian, deemed a strategic threat, brought the former Safavid lands into more direct contact with their northern neighbor in the 1720s. This strategic interest coupled with Peter I's commercial concerns in an effort to reorient the Eurasian trade to Europe toward the Caspian and the Volga River route. Shortly after, in Iran, the reconstruction (with different ideological supports) of the Safavid Empire under Nader Shah drew political consciousness toward the region. Nader's campaigns to control the Uzbek cities, the Turkmen steppe, and the Caucasus as far as the Terek River meant that Iranian territory encircled the

southern shore of the Caspian. Nader sought to control this space with the construction of fleet, with the support of British officers. This action mirrored his efforts to dominate the Persian Gulf at the same period. Taken together, these rising imperial ambitions brought about greater contact between Russia and the post-Safavid territories, including commercial exchange.

The basis for diplomacy and trade during this period was created during this time, with two treaties between Nader's Iran and the Russian Empire. The 1732 Treaty of Rasht and 1735 Treaty of Ganja restored previously occupied lands to Iran, but guaranteed Russia the right to appoint permanent consuls in Rasht and other port cities, and even more importantly, privileges to trade without any tariffs for all goods in the country. Russian diplomats insisted on the enforcement of these terms during the following seventy years, often constraining the ability of local rulers to fix duties on imports and exports.

Following the end of a long phase of civil war in the late 1750s in Iran and the failure of a state-sponsored Persian Company in Astrakhan in the early 1760s, the structures by which Russian-Iranian relations were shaped further by the regional autonomy of governors north of the Alburz Mountains. Several efforts by Karim Khan Zand to install governors in Rasht and Astarabad were overturned by rebellions in favor of established ruling families. Consequently, the Zands withdrew to Shiraz, allowing these regions, as well as much of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus, to manage their own affairs in exchange for annual tributes. The Russian consuls attempted to influence the balance of power by moving the consulates to alternative port cities. However, Hedayat-Allah Khan of Rasht and Fath-'Ali Khan of Qoba were able to respond by seizing additional territory and blocking the consulates from moving to areas outside of their control. Consequently, the Collegium of Foreign Affairs and Consul Yablonski chose a new strategy in the early 1770s, providing intelligence and support to these leaders, in exchange for guarantees of the safety and privileges of the Empress' subjects. Previously cool relations turned into a loose system of alliances.

The rulers of Qoba and Rasht sustained their autonomy by honoring the terms of the treaties of the 1730s, eliminating rival producers of commodities, controlling trade routes, and acting as intermediaries in trade. This last adaptation is particularly important, as it allowed them to fund their courts and armies without levying tariffs. Hedayat-Allah Khan empowered local landholders as tax farmers, sharing the profits of trade in valued fabrics, including silk, with the Gilani aristocracy. This allowed him to create shared interest with his subjects, while denying competitors access to markets and the Russian trade. He followed the Safavid model of “monopoly” in these goods. This system enabled him to earn massive revenues and pay taxes to Shiraz, while honoring Nader’s agreements with St. Petersburg. Using these revenues and intelligence from the merchants, these two khanates expanded and launched campaigns that gave them control over the internal politics of neighbors along the Caspian coast from Tunakabon to the Terek River in Daghestan.

The death of Karim Khan Zand in 1779 caused a series of crises in the region that contributed to its polarization between Qajars and the Russian Empire. In Iran, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar returned from exile and built a state largely through exploitation of the Caspian trading networks. The Qajars had tried since the 1760s to lure Russian merchants to ports of the southeastern Caspian, but now Agha Mohammad opened negotiations with the Caspian flotilla in 1782. Though these talks ended in mutual distrust and the temporary detention of Russian officers, Agha Mohammad’s continued efforts to negotiate show an awareness of the Caspian trade. Contrary to the existing scholarship, which claims a constant hostility between the two sides, he demonstrated an interest in working with Russia to gain a stake in this trade. Agha Mohammad offered access to a pier in Mazandaran, but also demanded that the Governor of Astrakhan grant passports to more Iranian merchants to carry goods in and out of the city to Iran and Central Asia.

Agha Mohammad also built an army and political structure that exploited the Caspian system to gain support in the north. He focused on raiding during the first years of his rise to power, winning

support among Kurdish and Turkmen tribes of the north by distributing revenues taken along the trade routes. During a series of campaigns in Gilan, he co-opted much of the nobility that had been loyal to Hedayat-Allah Khan by distribution of spoils. This distributive system of rule was applied repeatedly in the south later in his career and could, if further study of the Iranian context confirms this pattern, help to explain the decentralized nature of the Qajar state from its inception.

The second major crisis took place in the affairs of Qoba and Georgia, where numerous small khanates of the South Caucasus attempted to redefine their place in the balance of power after 1779. The Georgian effort to maintain control over Ganja and Qarabagh, under threat from Qoba, was one of several reasons the Tsar Erekli petitioned for protectorate status in 1783. Still, as late as 1782, both sides continued to appeal to Iranian political legitimacies based in the Safavid and Afsharid past to legitimize their claims over this territory.

The efforts of the khanates to protect their claims in the scramble for power that followed the death of Karim Khan and then Fath-'Ali Khan in 1789 led them to seek the patronage of either Russia or Agha Mohammad Khan. This led to a patchwork of alliances and loyalties across the South Caucasus, mostly in today's Azerbaijan, that can be attributed in part to the unraveling of the Caspian order of the eighteenth century. These factors drew Russian political and military involvement in the region to replace its earlier, mostly commercial interests, and brought them into conflict with Qajar state ideology of Safavid revivalism. These factors resulted in the 1795 sack of Tbilisi by Agha Mohammad Khan and the outbreak of war under his successor, Fath-'Ali Shah. The alliances of the First Russo-Persian War largely follow from the conflicts of the 1780s and 90s, with smaller states in Ganja and along the Caspian coast supporting the Qajars against Georgian and Russian claims over their territory. After Iran's defeat in the Second Russo-Persian War (1826-1828), the Treaty of Turkmanchai established an entirely new basis for relations in the region, one in which Russia acted as the single dominant regional power. This balance of

power and economic domination lasted, in various forms, until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the new decentralization of the region.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

This research is particularly relevant when looking at the post-Soviet period in the Caspian and efforts of littoral states to claim valuable resources and find a new basis for regional cooperation. Much like the period of my research, the last twenty-four years have seen newly independent states seek to assert their control over valuable commodities - in the modern context, the oil and natural gas of Azerbaijan provides the best example of this trend. Additionally, new initiatives seem likely to enable more transportation through the Caspian region, including talk of new rail connections after the Fourth Caspian Summit, held in 2014 in Astrakhan. Another important parallel is the shared interest of Caspian states in excluding rival powers from establishing a military presence in the Caspian. These efforts were effective, historically, when Russia and Iran shared an interest in anti-Ottoman policies. In the early modern period, this often meant redirecting trade away from the Levant routes to the north or to the Persian Gulf. In the eighteenth century, these efforts were often directed at the British Empire, including Russian attempts to prevent the creation of a fleet in the south Caspian under British influence. Similarly, the Fourth Caspian Summit concluded with an agreement to deny access to the Caspian Sea to all military forces, except for those of the littoral powers themselves.

During the eighteenth century, such efforts largely excluded outside powers from economic, as well as military access to the Caspian region. Currently however, they seem to remove potential sources of conflict without closing the Caspian to outside economic actors. The autonomous states of the post-Safavid period survived by seeking to balance the influence neighboring powers, while inviting commercial connections and selling commodities now under their own local control. This strategy seems to be a viable option for many of the post-Soviet states of Central Asia, which have simultaneously sought increased economic ties with China, cultural and ideological links to Turkey or Iran, and maintain

long-standing social, economic, security connections to Russia. Similar to the Caspian littoral states of the eighteenth century, these newly independent regions can be expected to invite increased commerce and investment from these major powers, while preventing any from gaining a monopoly of influence.

Conclusions

Between 1732 and 1779, Russian and Iranian rulers and merchants collectively participated in the creation of a Caspian network of trade, mostly in textiles, foodstuffs, and metal goods. This system was sustained by autonomous regional powers, which sought to instrumentalize imperial interests to rise to regional hegemony and maintain their autonomy from the Zands. During this period, these polities balanced economic ties with Russia against ideological connections to Iran as a single state. Gilan and Qoba-Derbent, gained considerable advantages by building mutually supporting alliances with each other and Russia that enabled territorial expansion and control over vassal states in Talesh, Baku, Sheki, and other neighboring khanates. The Qajar distributive model of rule and the efforts of the South Caucasus khanates to seize a greater portion of the productive areas of neighboring states broke this system down in the 1780s and 1790s, leading to increased direct Iranian and Russian intervention in the Caucasus. Conflicting commercial and ideological goals of the two states led inevitably to conflict and the reordering of the Caspian system under Russian control after 1828.

Plans for Future Research:

The Title VIII fellowship provided me the opportunity to carry out the majority of my dissertation research in Russia during the past year. I have returned to Yale for the Fall 2015 semester, to teach and organize this material. I hope to visit additional archives during the spring and summer of 2016 with funding from the university. I plan to return to Moscow to access materials at RGVA that were not available on microfilm during the past year, in addition to Persian manuscripts and consular correspondence in the British Library. I presented my first preliminary conclusions on Gilan's role in the eighteenth century Caspian order at the Middle East History and Theory Conference at the University of

Chicago. I hope to give further presentations at various conferences during the coming year, showing my findings on the emergence of Qajar power in the Caspian context.



Figure 1: At Tsaritsyno Palace in Moscow, Russia



Figure 2: At the Borodino battlefield