



Received: 2022/07/30  
Accepted: 2023/05/11  
Published: 2023/07/01

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How to cite this article:  
Abdollahi, Sahar; Mirzaei,  
Saeedeh; Mousavi Haji, Seyyed  
Rasoul. (2023). How and Why  
Nader Shah Established the Navy  
in the Caspian Sea, *The  
International Journal of  
Humanities* (2023) Vol. 30 (3):  
(94-116).

<https://ejih.modares.ac.ir/article-27-62742-en.html>

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# How and Why Nader Shah Established the Navy in the Caspian Sea

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**Abstract:** The article, by using historical texts, attempts to reconstruct part of the ups and downs of the Caspian Sea's southern coastal history, the importance of navigation on the shores and ports of the Caspian Sea, and the impact of Nader Shah's policies on the formation and prosperity of navigation in northern Iran. Based on library resources and a thorough analysis of the contents, the article seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What were Nader Shah Afshar's motives and goals in establishing shipping in the Caspian Sea? 2. Why the Russian government was suspicious of this issue? The findings of the study indicate that Nader Shah intended to boost the commercial prosperity of the country by forming a navy in the Caspian Sea and also achieve his political and military goals which were in contrast to the interests of the Russian Tsarist government. Finally, the main purpose of this study is to examine the state of trade, navigation, and shipbuilding during the Nader Shah period, by using the historical approach and archaeological evidence of the shipwreck off the coast of Chamkhaleh in Langarud County which is undoubtedly closely related to the political-military presence of the government and social presence. Hence, the role and position of local rulers of the Caspian Sea coasts and how they interacted with the Afsharid dynasty and foreign companies are noteworthy.

**Keywords:** Caspian Sea; Shipbuilding; Russia; John Alton.

## Introduction

The Caspian Sea has always been considered the most important northern waterway in all historical periods of Iran. The re-establishment of Iran's sovereignty over all its borders during

the Safavid era (1501-1736 AD) and the presence of obedient local rulers in the north were two main factors of safety and economic growth in northern ports at that time. However, after the decline of Safavids and the establishment of the rule of Afghan tribesmen in Iran, a chaotic period started that led to a downturn in businesses, especially in maritime trade. After Nader Shah Afshar's accession (1736-1747 A.D), he prepared the required facilities for establishing a naval fleet in the Caspian Sea. Nader Shah felt the necessity of a direct presence in the Caspian Sea and having control over its vital resources. So he paved the way for restarting the marine trade in Iran again. This study is looking to find answers to the following questions: 1. What were the main political and military reasons of Nader Shah Afshar for establishing a naval fleet in the Caspian Sea? 2. Which economic goals did Nader Shah follow by establishing a naval fleet in Iran's northern waters? 3. Why Langarud was chosen as the base of navigation in the Caspian Sea? 4. Why did the Tsardom of Russia mistrust Iran's shipping in the Caspian Sea and in its activities at that time? Despite many studies about Nader Shah's

performances in establishing Iran's southern fleet, there are not many comprehensive studies about the northern fleet, its details, and the goals of its establishment in the Afsharid era. So, this study, by using the historical approach, is trying to examine the reasons and results of the establishment of naval fleet by Nader Shah Afshar.

### **Research background**

Many studies have been done in the field of the political history of the Afsharid dynasty but historians and politicians who have written about the trade and navigation in this era are so rare. "The Rise and Fall of Nader Shah" by Willem Floor (1989), a Dutch historian and orientalist, has an important role in conducting this research. Especially the 4<sup>th</sup> section of the book which is about Nader Shah's relations with European companies and his actions toward establishing a naval fleet is noteworthy. Also, there are some other books by this writer in this regard. Laurence Lockhart (1964), a British historian, taking the side of Englishmen's actions during the Nader Shah's reign, tries to find them not guilty. Lockhart presents a positive face of Europeans and

mostly British people; however, it is inferred from historical sources that Europeans, especially British merchants by bringing woolen textiles to Chamkhaleh looked to gain the most commercial advantages with the lowest cost. In another essay, Lockhart tries to tell the readers that Iran's navy was formed with the aid of the British East India Company. However other sources show that foreign countries made a lot of sabotages in the process of establishing the Nader Shah's navy in the regions of Chamkhaleh (in Langarud County) and Mashhadsar (currently known as Babolsar). They also played an important role in some of the Iranian failures in the naval wars. Acts of sabotage by European countries resulted in Nader Shah's northern fleet (on the coast of Chamkhaleh) failure. "The History of Nadir Shah" by Jonas Hanway (1967), a British merchant who met Nader Shah at the near end of his reign describes Iran's condition in this period from different aspects like military operations against Ottoman, commercial situation, etc. Also, he has written about Nader Shah's efforts in the northern fleet and southern fleet, especially about the Al-Muntafiq Arab tribe and their role in Basrah's

development. Also, Hosein Tofighiyan has made many comprehensive and independent researches on stranded ships which have been discovered in recent years on the Caspian coasts. His most relevant essay (2015) on this study is "A Study on the Caspian navigation background; Focusing on the Structure of local ships". In this essay, by recognizing some ships made of wooden timber on the coasts of cities including Talesh, Roudsar, Tonekabon, and Gorgan Gulf, he provided valuable insights into the construction of ships and navigation in the Caspian Sea.

### **1. Growing Insecurity during Safavids and Decreasing Authority On the Caspian Sea**

Shah Abbas (1588 –1629) is considered a reformist Safavid ruler who established a powerful reign. Roger Savory, an Iranologist and specialist on the Safavid, believe: "As this great king (Abbas the Great) passed away, wealth and welfare ended in the country too" (Savory, 2000: 225). So, a few decades later when Sultan Husayn (1694-1722) got into power, Iran's territory was limited from Kandahar to Georgia and from Iraq to Oman islands and Makran. It was a chaotic country

ruled by an incompetent and corrupt king (Abdolwahab, 1998:462). The chaos in the society threatened the Safavid Empire extremely. It was time when Afghans were behind the Isfahan gateways and were about to seize the city, on the other side of the country, Lezgins tribes attacked Shirvan (currently part of the Azerbaijan Republic). On the other hand, Russian soldiers were rushing toward Derbent (currently in Russia) and the Ottoman Empire bypassing the Iranian borders to occupy Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, and, Kermanshah (Abdolwahab, 1998:462). As the Iranian government had a poor and weak navy, or it's better to say that there was no navy in the Caspian Sea, chaos was created in the Caspian Sea and hinterlands too. Engelbert Kaempfer, German explorer and writer mentions that Iran at that time had no specific navy. There were only some armed merchants who navigated the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. These small ships were at the command of Tupchi-Bashi (the commander of the empire's artillery corps) who was considered an admiral too and appointed by Safavid kings (Kaempfer, 1971: 90).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the downfall of the Safavid dynasty followed by a period of conflict and unrest in Iran. Russian political influence in Iran started in the reign of Peter the Great (1682 –1725). Before the tumultuous period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some Iranian cities located in the Caspian Sea and Caucasus region as silk producing zones as well as trade routes of Indian merchandise (some of these routes connecting to another route in middle Asia reached to Russia), played an important role in the international trading (Atkin, 2003: 31). Peter the Great had realized the importance of economics very well. In 1715, he appointed Artemi. P. Volinski as Russia's ambassador to Iran. He was expected to gather information about the general condition of Iran including its lands, seas, cities, ports, etc., identifying the main rivers flowing to the Caspian Sea and how far these rivers ships can sail, the Iranian king's military and commercial ships and also all forts and castles in Iran. He especially had the mission to gather data about Gilan province and identify the mountains and impassable roads which separate that region from the other coastal Caspian cities (Nafisi, 2005: 113). As a result of his investigations after a while,

Peter sent an army to conquer Gilan and in 1722 Rasht was occupied by Russia. Two years later, he signed an agreement with a representative of Shah Tahmasp II Safavid (1722-1732) in Saint Petersburg. Under this agreement, Peter helped Shah Tahmasp II dislodge Afghans from Iran, and instead, the Russian government gets eternally possession of some parts of Iran including Derbent and Baku regions and also the cities of Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad. In the Afsharid era, due to the chaotic situation, Iran's and especially Gilan's economic situation descended and people suffered financial downturn (Atkin, 2003: 36).

## **2. Reasons behind Formation of Navy in the Caspian Sea during Nader Shah**

Nader Shah Afshar decided to establish a navy for different reasons which all indicated the real intent and goal of the king (Lockhart, 1964: 57). He understood that one of the most important reasons for the Ottoman Empire's superiority and power in the region is its domination over the seas. So they had the third most powerful naval forces and gained control over the whole Black Sea as their territorial

waters. Nader Shah did the same in the Caspian Sea. When he invaded India, to preserve his influence on the Indian subcontinent and due to the long distance and difficulties of using the land routes, he understood the importance of naval forces in the Caspian Sea more than before. The Iranian king knew that by establishing a northern fleet, he would be able to keep control over the regions more powerful and better. It should be mentioned that when Nader Shah got into power and by suppression the Afghans and repulse the Ottoman Empire from Iranian-occupied territories, some changes happened in the sovereignty of the Caspian Sea. In other words, Russia found that Iran was changed into a powerful rival that wouldn't accept the previous treaty which identified Russia's authorities on the Caspian Sea and its south and south-west coasts. After a decade of occupying Gilan, Russian armies were forced to leave Iran's northern regions (Fakhte Jobneh, 2004: 178). But according to the Rasht Treaty of 1732 between Iran and Russia, Russian merchants, for trade relations with India or other countries, were allowed to not pay customs duties on Iranian seaports or land borders. Also according to article 5<sup>th</sup> of

another treaty that concluded in 1735 between Iran and Russia (known as the Treaty of Ganja), Russian merchants and their ships were allowed to stop in all the harbors, seaboards, and wharves and unload the ships. Nader Shah's efforts to make advancements in military goals, let him understand the importance of establishing the Iranian navy. Later in the Dagestan campaign, Nader followed the same ideology. In Dagestan again he needed to use ships and sloops for providing the army with food and weapons from the southern coasts of the Caspian Sea to its western coasts. It should be noted that Russia had monopolized control of ships sailing through the Caspian Sea and the Russian ship owners received the highest rental rate to prepare most of the logistic of Iran.

It is said that in 1740 Iran's ambassador, Hossein Khan, went to Russia to inform Nader Shah's invasion of India. He also asked the Russian authorities to send some shipwrights to Iran. Russia didn't accept this request and told him that there is only some foreign shipbuilder in Russia and their government can't let them leave the country to work for others. It seemed that Russia didn't satisfy with

the strong presence of Iran in the Caspian Sea regions (Hanway, 1967: 123). Nader Shah for achieving his goal i.e. building Iranian ships to sail through the Caspian Sea decided to put England under pressure by interrupting their trade in the Caspian Sea. It should be added that in 1734 British merchants of a Russian company at St. Petersburg obtained permission to trade with Iran through Russia and across the Caspian Sea. Captain John Elton was a British merchant, shipbuilder, and seaman who had lived for a long time in Russia and traded with some regions in Turkestan. He entered Resht for the first time in 1739 and received a warm welcome from Reza Qoli Mirza Afshar, the first son of the Nader Shah and the governor of the Gilan region. He sold his cargo of broadcloth (woolen textiles) and instead bought the silk of Gilan that was revived again at that time. So, Elton was successful in finding a good market. Also, Reza Qoli granted him the liberty to trade throughout Iran which doubled the success of his trip. He then came back to St. Petersburg and gave some reports to British merchants about the advantages of trading with Iranian and tried to persuade them to go to Gilan.

Captain John Elton also wrote a letter to the British ambassador plenipotentiary to Russia and explained the details of his trading plan with Iran (Sykes, 1977:253/2). He believed that carrying British wool products through Russia into Iran cost less than transporting them through India or Ottoman Empire. Moreover, trading the silk of Gilan was more profitable. Elton suggested that for the successful execution of the plan, British merchants should have their ships on both the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. Finally, Captain John Elton accepted Nader Shah's job offer, and the Iranian king employed him. Elton started to build ships in Chamkhaleh (a city in the central district of Langarud county in Gilan Province of northwestern Iran) and established a shipbuilding base in this region. The company was headed by John Elton. Thomas Woodroofe and Jonas Hanway worked there as navigators and historians respectively. Its produced ships sailed across the Caspian Sea from Russia to Iran and back. These halcyon days were short-lived, however.

One of the most important results of establishing the shipbuilding company was drawing an incredibly detailed map featuring

a chart of the Caspian Sea and its surroundings, harbors, and anchorages. This map which was called "A plain chart of the Caspian Sea" was prepared by Thomas Woodroofe. He was the seafarer for a British trading company established on the Caspian Sea in 1740. Woodroofe wrote the sailing directions and prepared this particular map based on the observations of Captain Elton and presented it to M. Jonas Hanway of Saint Petersburg in 1745. The map was approved according to the Act of Parliament in 1753 and later in 1762 published for the first time in Jonas Hanway's notes titled, "A Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea". Nader Shah had special attention to the Caspian Sea as the importance of marine trade for increasing government and military forces' income. Historically, Gilan province had great importance for being the production and trading zone of silk. In the nine century (4<sup>th</sup> AH) some people called this region the "land of cocoon and silk" due to the abundance of silk in this place (Al-Maqdisi, 1982: 517/2). Based on the historical sources, silk had a key role in Iran's economy and trade and Nader Shah was completely aware of this positive

point too. Al-Maqdisi describes the silk of Gilan as: "Gilan's textiles are famous in Egypt and Iraq" (Al-Maqdisi, 1982: 367/2). After the Ilkhanate edge, trade relations between Iranian and European flourished and merchants from different countries including Europeans came to Iran. Their favorite merchandises were silk and its derived products like textiles, carpets, and rugs. Consequently, Gilan was considered their favorite destination. Marco Polo Italian traveler who visited Iran in the thirteenth century (late seventh century AH) mentioned Genoese merchants who navigated the Caspian Sea at that time (Marco Polo, 1971: 25). These merchants intended to establish a shipping line carrying the Chinese and Iranian silk to Europe through the Volga and Don rivers. Also Venetian had a plan to export the silk of Gilan through the Caspian Sea (Javadi, 1999: 113). The Italian merchants primarily were looking for Chinese silk. Although Chinese silk had a lower price and quality in comparison to Iranian silk, it had a high volume of production so it was more profitable for merchants (Taghvi & Mosavi haji, 2015: 121).

### **3. Gilan Silk: Decline after Safavids and Revival by Nader Shah**

In the second half of the 17th century, Frederick III Duke of Holstein-Gottorp became aware of the huge profit in the Iran silk trade and its capability to provide the needed silk for the Hamburg textile factory. So he sent Adam Olearius to Iran in 1630. Olearius stayed in Iran for many years. In 1638, He estimated the annual silk production of Gilan province as about 1100 tons and in Mazandaran province as about 270 tons.

The silk trade in Iran experienced a very glorious period during (Shah) Abbas. At that time, Iran had a friendly relationship with England. Abbas promised Edward Kunak, representative of East India Company in Iran, to sell his respective company annually between one to three thousand bales (of silk) by a contract of six shillings per pound. Also, the same weight of the cargo was allowed to export from the Bandar-e Jask (port of Jask) without incurring any duty (Olearius, 1984:438). At that time, Iran's silk trade was mostly under the control of the Armenians who were settled in New Julfa (a suburb of Isfahan) by the edict of (Shah) Abbas the Great.



The Government attempted to create a silk monopoly. As a result, the silk was bought by the government at the lowest price and then sold at the highest price. So this unfairness made peasants angry and unsatisfied (Olearius, 1984:420). Jean Chardin, a French merchant who visited Iran after the death of (Shah) Abbas the Great, estimated the total silk production in 1660 as more than 2500 tons. From this total amount, each city shared a different amount of silk production. For example, Gilan's share was 1770 tons, Khorasan's share was 531 tons, Mazandaran's share was 354 tons, Kerman's share was 354 tons, Georgia's share was 354 tons and the central provinces' share was 531 tons (Chardin, 1971:370/4).

In the 18th century and during the reign of Afsharid, a downward trend was experienced in silk production in Iran. Hanway, who was in Iran during Nader Shah's reign, estimated the total silk production of Gilan in 1744 as about 100 tons (Hanway, 1753: 2/16). It should be noted that local merchants had a significant role in the trading of precious commodities like silk. At the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century, Gilan's merchants who

mostly trade silk and rice were capable of competing with merchants from Western Europe and Russia (Serna, 1984:348). In general, the value of Iranian raw silk exports during 1744-1749 (in the Afsharid period) was around 93375 Lire and the cost of nearly 400 grams of raw silk was about 10 shillings. The gross profit (minus the expenses) of its trade was about 50 percent (Curzon, 1970: 648/2). Based on the historical texts, it can be said that there are some differences from the Chardin report in 1670 to Hanway's one in 1744. On the other hand, we should notice that Iranian were attacked by Afghan tribesmen in the early 18th century which led the country to chaos and the central government's loss of power. One of the main reasons for Iran's economic decline in the 18th century was the severe drop in silk production. Hanway estimated Gilan silk production as only 360000 pounds which is not comparable with Chardin (2760000 pounds) and Olearius (1728000 pounds) estimations. Lockhart also estimated Gilan silk exports to Turkey and beyond around 1400000 pounds with a value of 3200000 rubles (Issawi, 1984: 113). Hanway also added that as a result of regional unrest, Gilan silk production severely

decreased and reached one-sixth of its normal rate. Also, its export which was done by Armenian and Russian merchants reached one-tenth of its normal rate (Hanway, 1753: 2/150). As a result of this situation, British

merchants completely left Iran in 1749 (Hanway, 1753: 2/289, 335). Ahmad Seif has explained the trading condition of Iran's silk exports by British merchants during 1743-1748 (coinciding with Nader Shah's reign) in table1:

**Table1. The rate of exported silk by British merchants (Seif, 2001:47)**

Year	Rate	Year	Rate
1743	120000	1746	50500
1744	50000	1747	30000
1745	62500	1748	12000

A large percentage of these figures consisted of Gilan's silk production. According to these numbers, after declining the Safavids and during the first six years of starting Afsharid's reign, the rate of Gilan exported silk significantly decreased (Barmaki, 2015: 76). Nader Shah employed John Elton, established the shipbuilding company, and also the northern fleet succeeded to reopen the marine trade route for European merchants and glorify the Gilan silk trade as its golden age in the period of (Shah) Abbas the Great (Ibid). During the reign of Nader Shah, Britain-Iran trading in the southern boards of the Caspian Sea got an increasing trend. Britain shipped its

commodities in large volumes to the Black Sea and Trabzon Port which belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Then the cargoes, through the Ottoman land routes, were sent to the Iranian markets like Tabriz and Gilan (Bamdad, 1984: 176/4).

Olivier, a French traveler, describes British commercial firms in Iran: "Britain established its commercial firms and companies in Iran in 1739 (during the reign of Nader Shah). Before that time, European, Armenian, and Jewish merchants had transferred large amounts of silk by animals and through the land routes to Istanbul (Olivier, 1992: 182). As the British company that established the shipbuilding

base in the southern boards of the Caspian Sea folded up, Russian merchants transferred all the Gilan productions to their country. So they became very rich (Bamdad, 1984: 183/4).

#### **4. Langarud; First base of Northern Fleet Established by Nader Shah**

There is no hint at the name “Langarud” in the geographical texts which were written until the end of the eleventh century (6th century AH). Probably the reason for this anonymity was the great importance of another region which was called Ranekouh which included all the lands between Langarud and Tonekabon. Its name was used for the first time in the book “History of Tabarestan, Royan and Mazandaran” and beside the name of Faramaz Ibn Mardanshah who was one of the important figures of this region. In concomitance with the king of Mazandaran (Ali I), Faramaz Ibn Mardanshah traveled from Isfahan to Tabarestan and then they entered the Langarud. Zahir al-Din Mar'ashi (the author of the above-mentioned book) did not provide further details about this city. The reason for choosing the name “Langarud” for the city was due to its anchorage (as in the Persian language, Langar

means anchorage). The anchorage of the city was considered one of the most important trading sources of Ranekouh with other regions. Hanway in his reports mentioned the prosperity of trading and shipbuilding in Langarud in the 18th century (Hanway, 1967: 193). According to the report of Mar'ashi, Langarud was an unimportant village until the end of the 14th century (9th century AH) but in the reign of the Kiya'ids dynasty, especially under the rule of Seyed Ali Kia's sons, it started to become a prosperous and developed region (Mar'ashi, 1970: 118).

The official relations between Iran and Russia were developed during the Safavid era. Before that period, there were limited trading relations between Astrakhan Port and Langarud which was Gilan's most important port at that time (Azimi, 2002: 45). In 1556, the Astrakhan Port was conquered by Russia. So its policy with Iran was formed mostly based on military goals. In addition to trading issues, the port had an important role in Russia's military policies regarding Iran in the Caspian Sea, Caucasia, and central Asia regions (Shaninov, 1978: 75 & Strickler, 2003: 24). However, the Caspian Sea was the only communication link

that through its location Russia could be connected to Gilan province and more generally to Iran (Shirley, 1999: 103). Russia by making relationships with Iran aimed to strengthen its relations with both local rulers (Kiya'ids dynasty) and the Safavid government. So by this policy, they could satisfy their interests. According to the available pieces of evidence, the slave trade was one of the most profitable trades of the Kiya'id ruler. He had four ships for trading with Russia on the Langarud- Astrakhan route and he got profit from commodity and slave exchanges (Shirley, 1999: 210).

In the Safavid era, Langarud got a good position. (Shah) Abbas the Great intentionally decided to decrease the importance of Lahijan province, the capital of the Kiya'ids dynasty. This policy led to the growth of the adjacent regions of this province. Historical sources related to the Safavid era like *Tarikh-e Alam-ara-ye Abbasi* (the history of the Iranian Safavid dynasty) mentioned the anchorage of Langarud many times (Turkman Munshi, 2007:450/2 & 492). The port's importance was insomuch that some of the foreign countries' representatives after passing the Caspian Sea,

stop in the Langarud anchorage and entered the Gilan coast. The German Empire representatives were one of these diplomatic groups that had arrived at Gilan under the chairmanship of "Estephan Kakashi". Unfortunately, he passed away in Langarud due to the inappropriate condition weather on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1603 (George Tectander von der Jabel, 1972: 45 & Abbasi, 2006:34).

During the reign of Nader Shah Afshar (1736 - 1747), due to the importance of navigation for Nader Shah, Langarud became the center of shipbuilding and became a prosperous village (Hanway, 1967: 107-108). Jonas Hanway who traveled to Iran during the reign of Nader Shah described Nader Shah's navy: "John Elton who was assigned by Nader Shah to build a ship in the North Sea found good timbers in Gilan but due to the poor conditions of roads couldn't bring them to the anchorage." (Hanway, 1967: 192). He then referred to the ship anchor and stated that although the Caspian Sea contains ironstone, there was no one to build an anchor. So he looked for a missed anchor of a Russian ship. Hanway states that the sailcloth was made of cotton and ropes were made of hemp fibers.

The carpenters of the shipbuilding company had different nationalities. There were some Indians, some newly Muslim Russian, and British shipbuilders who worked together in the company (Hanway, 1967: 192). "On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1743 (16<sup>th</sup> Shawwal 1156 AH) I arrived at Langarud port. The ship captain told me that Mr. Elin came to Langarud (from Rasht) to manage the navigation affairs... his residence in Langarud was 8 miles off the coasts." (Hanway, 1967: 115). Nader Shah, who was the king of Iran at the time, had some plans to build ships in the Caspian Sea. He intended to control the navigation condition and also suppress Tatars who were mountain-dwellers and brave people. It was the time when Langarud village flourished. Hanway also wrote: "I went to the Langarud many times. Sometimes for some administrative affairs, I came back to Rasht and then returned to Langarud again." He mentioned the shipbuilding in Langarud and wrote: "By the beginning of April, Mr. Elin had constructed the bow and stern of the ship. The shipbuilders were mostly Indian. While they did their job so carefully, it took a lot of time to finish it and also they were unable to do some important

tasks." (Hanway, 1967: 118). During his trip to Langarud, Mirza Mehdi Khan was the commodore of Langarud. Hanway states: "As Mirza Mehdi Khan was the son of Monajem Bashi (ruler of Gilan), he was appointed to this post. However, he had not ever seen a ship." (Hanway, 1967: 118). Hanway also wrote about the ship launching in Langarud: "The ship which was built by Mr. Elin for Nader Shah was ready to use in the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1744 (12<sup>th</sup> Jumada I 1157 AH) in Langarud but due to the shallow water, there were some problems for launching the ship. So they decided to build a dam to increase the level of the water and transferred it from land to water. Elin, the builder of the ship, was scared of Russian pirates because they decided to set fire to the ship. He built an extra sail for the ship to help get it out of trouble and also appoint a guard for providing its security (Hanway, 1967: 101). Jaubert describes Langarud as: "Langarud is located in a lowland and it is written {in historical sources} that until a few centuries ago some parts of this village was under the sea... it is said that by the end of the Afsharid dynasty, there were around 3000 houses in Langarud

but I have not seen more than 600 houses” (Jaubert, 1971: 342).

Captain Charles Francis MacKenzie, the first British consul in Rasht that traveled from Rasht to Astara in 1858 anticipated the weight of silk in Langarud and Ranekouh as about 18kg (MacKenzie, 1980:47). Rabino explains the Chamkhaleh port in Langarud: “There is a customs building and a hunting spot in Chamkhaleh. Also, there are two oil stores where their oil was transferred to Langarud by rowboats. There are 16 rowboats for stuffing and striping the cargo of the ships which were anchored in the gulf” (Rabino, 1995: 400). Chamkhaleh port in Langarud was Iran’s most important coastal port during the Afsharid period in the Caspian Sea coastline. “The mouth of the gulf is so wavy that nearly it’s impossible to unload the passengers from the ship. In the wintertime, sometimes passengers wandered for hours near their destination and then they had to change their way toward the BâdKube (Baku) after spending, a somber week in its humid weather which smells oily too, try their chance again and return to the Chamkhaleh port once more (Curzon, 1970: 63/1). On the other hand, traveling by sea was

quite impossible in some seasons due to bad weather conditions. Passengers even postponed their trips for up to six months. The other danger of traveling by sea include piracy attacks and hostility between states and tribal riparians (Mazinani & et all, 2017: 201).

Long distances also made the travel difficult and exhausting. Ships sailing in the northern ports of Chamkhaleh seashores started from the end of winter to the end of spring (Al-Sa‘dī, 1993: 433). Chodźko a Polish Iranologist after visiting Chamkhaleh port explains his observations: “There are 160 houses, immigration centers, and diverse populations is seen in this village... if there was no difficulty in entering the canal from the sea, the Chamkhaleh port could become one of the best ports in the seaboard... people do their living by sailing, fishing, and hunting the seabirds. Nearly all its people are sailors who own around 500 large boats with the capacity of 200 to 600 people.” (Chodźko, 2006: 20). He estimated Langarud’s population at 800 individuals and added: “Distance from Baku and Chamkhaleh port is 317 kilometers which took two or three days and from Astrakhan to Chamkhaleh port is 1233 kilometers which

took nine or ten days.” (Chodźko, 2006: 93). Jonas Hanway states that during Nader Shah’s reign navigation services from the Russian company, the Caucasus, and Mercury commuted in Chamkhaleh port. These ships did not follow a regular plan in winter... sometimes the ships returned to the country of origin without even delivery of the postal items (Hanway, 1967: 60). As mentioned earlier, the inadequate condition of Iran’s ports especially Chamkhaleh port makes the ship’s loading process difficult in winter. As a result, the merchandise was accumulated and got more expensive. There were no docks for the ships to be berthed. Due to the shallow water near the coasts, ships were forced to anchor in the middle of the sea so the passengers or cargoes were transferred to the port by smaller boats. The boxwood timber had relatively low cost but high freight rates made it so expensive. It was exported in as large amounts from the provinces along the Caspian Sea to Russia (Rostov) and England (Liverpool) (Curzon, 1970: 318/1).

Nader Shah asked Captain John Elton and Jonas Hanway (who came to Iran on behalf of the British government during the reign of

Nader Shah to examine the condition of Iranian silk and also other sources of exports) to use the same kind of timber for building the ships. According to some sources at least three ships, similar to the European styles, were built in Bushehr and the timbers produced in Northern provinces were used for building them. Also, some ships were bought from the Europeans and the local Arabs. Meanwhile, two ships were bought from the British East India Company which weighed about 400 tons, and 20 cannons were installed on each of them (Perry, 1986: 220). Nader Shah even ordered a 360 meters ship. The representative of the British East India Company warned him that a wooden ship with this length would have structurally an incompetent hull. The ship’s incomplete body was on the Bushehr coast even in the early Qajar period (Raean, 1971: 651). For building the ships and boats, Nader Shah not only hired Iranian carpenters but also other nationalities especially Indian carpenters were hired to help Iranian experts and the Indian and Baluch sailors were hired in his fleet (Moghtader, 1960: 126). Also, Nader Shah was interested to hire European sailors because, as mentioned before, they had valuable

experiences in traveling by ship. During this period special military ranks and titles of Europeans were used in Iran. The evidence of using foreign ranks in Nader Shah's navy is obvious in the text of the admiral appointment order which was issued for Latif Khan. Nader Shah chose him as the general captain of ports and coasts which is equal to the captain-lieutenant rank. Even if the king himself was not familiar with using these titles, the attention of his advisors and commanders like Mirza Mehdi Khan Astarabadi who was the chief secretary of Nader Shah and also the writer of the appointment order is significant (Sardadvar, 1975: 771).

## 5. Shipbuilding Company and its End

As previously mentioned, Nader Shah in the Dagestan military campaign faced a food shortage so he realized the advantages of starting a regular navy in the Caspian Sea (Hanway, 1967: 272). Floor believes when Nader Shah was about to establish a southern fleet in the Persian Gulf, He had suffered considerable hardship in preparing the military needs of Ganja in the Caucasus that was laid siege to him. Considering this fact, he appointed British Captain John Elton with the name of Jamal Beyg to establish the northern fleet. Also, Mohammad Hossein Khan was appointed as the admiral of the Caspian in 1738.



**Fig.1. The Breakwater part of a Ship's Bow**



Although it's not clear whether he had any fleet or not (Floor, 1989: 37). Sykes wrote: "Elton established the headquarters of his activities in Langarud and seriously started to work for solving all the problems. The trees were cut down and the timbers were dragged from the forest to the coast. The sailcloth was woven from cotton and robes were made from flax fiber. Since there was no anchor in those regions, he started to search and found it. During the reign of Nader Shah, the ships which were built by the order of Captain John Elton mostly were made from tarred timbers. Local people worked in the shipbuilding company without any payment so they were angry about their forced labor and non-paid job. However, Elton succeeded to build a 23-gunship and launch it. This ship which was built even better than the Russian ships was called "Nader" (Sykes, 1977: 225/2). By order of Nader Shah, the Russian ships in the Caspian Sea were obligated to greet this ship. However, Elton had bigger plans in his mind and decided to build at least 30 more ships. He even started the shipbuilding teaching the Iranian staff of his company and storing

ammunition and gun supplies. With the aid of merchant "Mango Graham", Elton prepared 15 tons of tins for the royal artillery. He then participated in the reconnaissance and determined the best military operations areas on the Caspian coasts. Elton, in an admirable act, sent two ships with rice cargo to the Iranian soldiers based on the Baku coasts. Soon after that, he started to prepare a particular map from the southeast coasts of the Caspian Sea by the order of Nader Shah and with the aid of Captain Woodroffe.

The Russian government angrily and nervously monitored Elton's actions and Iran's strategies for having a strong presence in the Caspian Sea. So they put the British government and Moscow Company under pressure to prevent Elton from collaborating with Iran. At that time, British people were still newcomer merchants in the region who had to carry the cargoes of Indian and Iranian ambassadors for free. In this fragile situation, their primary policy was to allure the king and local nobles and they avoided any kind of activity that raise suspicions which led to losing their trading situation. According to this

policy, the British tried not to engage themselves in the plans for establishing and strengthening the sea fleet. Because Nader Shah's navy on one side could be their business rival in the not-too-distant future. On the other side, their other partners in the region like Russia and Ottoman Empire would feel envious and vigilant about the Iranian fleet. Therefore, when Nader Shah with the aid of Captain Elton started to build ships and established a northern fleet in the Caspian Sea, British authorities sent Jonas Hanway to Iran to examine Elton's activities. Hanway

recognized Elton's activities as harmful to Britain's trading future and tried to dissuade him from continuing collaboration with Nader Shah. However, Hanway's efforts were in vain and Elton insisted on his decision. Even Britain's Minister Plenipotentiary to Saint Petersburg that was worried about the Russian retaliation and losing their commercial advantages, offered Elton a huge amount of money or a rank in the royal navy force to entice him for leaving Iran (Sykes, 1977: 225/2).



**Fig. 2. The Remains of a Ship**

But Elton, as a British adventurer and incautious, stubbornly continued to work in Iran. Nader Shah who was well aware that the pressure on Elton was building up, issued a

writ and expressed his appreciation for all of his attempts in Iran: "The most eminent Christian" is not allowed to leave Iran because he must attend the royal court in upcoming

Nowruz ceremony and do our fleet affairs correctly (Taheri, 1975: 198). That writ could partially rescue Elton from the accusations and pressures. Because Elton could claim that he served in Nader Shah's court compulsorily (Taheri, 1975: 209). The British merchant who came to Iran's coasts for his profit rejected all alluring offers of his respected government and with all difficulties made ships for Iranian. Nader Shah always expressed his appreciation and support for Elton. The Death of Nader Shah plunged the country into chaos and Elton

failed to follow up on his plans. He was also left alone among the exhaustive risks. The Russians that were so angry about Elton's actions plotted against him. Due to the local dissatisfaction in the region and probably because of a Russian conspiracy, Elton was assassinated. He survived the attack. Finally, in the dispute among the local rulers on the power, Elton for not supporting the ruler of Gilan province was arrested. Despite assuring him of saving his life, he was killed (Taheri, 1975: 221).



**Figs. 3-4. The Remains of Lale Roud Ship**

## Conclusion

The analysis of the maritime situation and trading during the interregnum between the decline of the Safavid Empire and Nader Shah's

accession to power shows a slump in commercial and marine activities, especially in the Caspian region. It was rooted in the

weakness of the government and the unstable condition of the country. In addition to that, European companies and also the powerful local rulers who were not supervised by the central government changed Gilan province into a place for fulfilling their desires. In this situation, the necessity of establishing a powerful and centralized government was felt more than at any time. This important task was accomplished by Nader Shah Afshar in the fourth decade of the 18th century. He deported Ghilzai tribes of Afghans from Iran, and put down the Russian and Ottoman Empire violator forces. Nader Shah readjusted Iran's boundaries to their historical limits and even extended them to the Indian subcontinent. Indian Abundant wealth, Iran's high military strength, and finally the country's peace and security during the reign of Nader Shah were good motivations to reappear the Iranian strength in trading and navigation. Nader Shah will be honored forever for being the first one in Iran in the Islamic period that revived North and South Sea fleets. Nader Shah by appointing Captain John Elton who was a famous British merchant, shipbuilder, and seaman who took valuable actions on the southern coasts of the

Caspian Sea. According to the historical texts and archaeological pieces of evidence, he established two shipbuilding centers; one in the Chamkhaleh port in Langarud and the other in the Mashhadsar (currently known as Babolsar), and started to work in these centers. The port of Chamkhaleh, the presence of European merchants, and silk trading all helped the Iranian government to maintain its power in the Caspian Sea. Also, the government got northern lands (generally the southern coasts of the Caspian Sea) under its control. Peace and security in this part of Iran led to the boom in trade during most of Nader Shah's ruling years. However, he did not stay in power for too long and he did not find the chance to build a firm political and economic basis for his achievements. Following Nader's murder in 1747, the navy fell apart. Also, like the British company that established the shipbuilding base in the southern boards of the Caspian Sea folded up, Russian merchants transferred all the Gilan productions to their country and became very rich. So Nader Shah's efforts on the southern coasts of the Caspian Sea did not wrap up but definitely, the positive impacts of his activities continued to exist later

in the Zand dynasty. The remains of some ships that ran aground on the coasts of the Caspian Sea show the importance of

navigation and trade in the port of Langarud for the later rulers.

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## چرایی و چگونگی تاسیس ناوگان دریایی نادرشاه در دریای کاسپی



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### چکیده

پژوهش پیش رو تلاش دارد به بازسازی بخشی از تاریخ پرفراز و نشیب سواحل جنوبی کاسپی، اهمیت دریانوردی در سواحل و بندرهای دریای خزر و تأثیر سیاست‌های نادرشاه در شکل‌گیری و رونق دریانوردی در شمال ایران با استفاده از متون تاریخی بپردازد. این نوشتار به شیوه کتابخان‌ای و به روش تحلیل و محتوا در پی پاسخ به این مسئله است که انگیزه و اهداف نادرشاه افشار در تأسیس کشتیرانی در دریای کاسپی و دلایل سوءظن دولت روسیه نسبت به این مهم را مورد واکاوی قرار دهد. یافته‌های پژوهش حاکی از آن است نادرشاه قصد داشت تا با تشکیل ناوگان دریایی در دریای خزر، به رونق تجاری کمک کند و افزون بر آن به اهداف سیاسی و نظامی خود نیز دست یابد که این مهم با منافع دولت تزاری روسیه در تضاد بود. درنهایت هدف اصلی این پژوهش بررسی وضعیت تجارت، دریانوردی و کشتی‌سازی دوره نادرشاه، با استفاده از رهیافت تاریخی و شواهد باستان‌شناختی کشتی غرق شده در سواحل چمخاله لنگرود است که بی‌شک رابطه تنگاتنگی با حضور سیاسی-نظامی حکومت و حضور اجتماعی-اقتصادی مردمی این منطقه دارد. از این رو نقش و جایگاه حکام محلی کرانه‌های دریای کاسپی و چگونگی نحوه تعامل آنان که با سلسله افشاریه و شرکت‌های تجاری خارجی داشته‌اند، شایسته توجه است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: نادرشاه، روسیه، دریای کاسپی، لنگرود، کشتی‌سازی، جان آلتون.