

**Lothar WEYS**  
*Doctor of History*

**Kamil IBRAHIMOV**  
*Doctor of History*

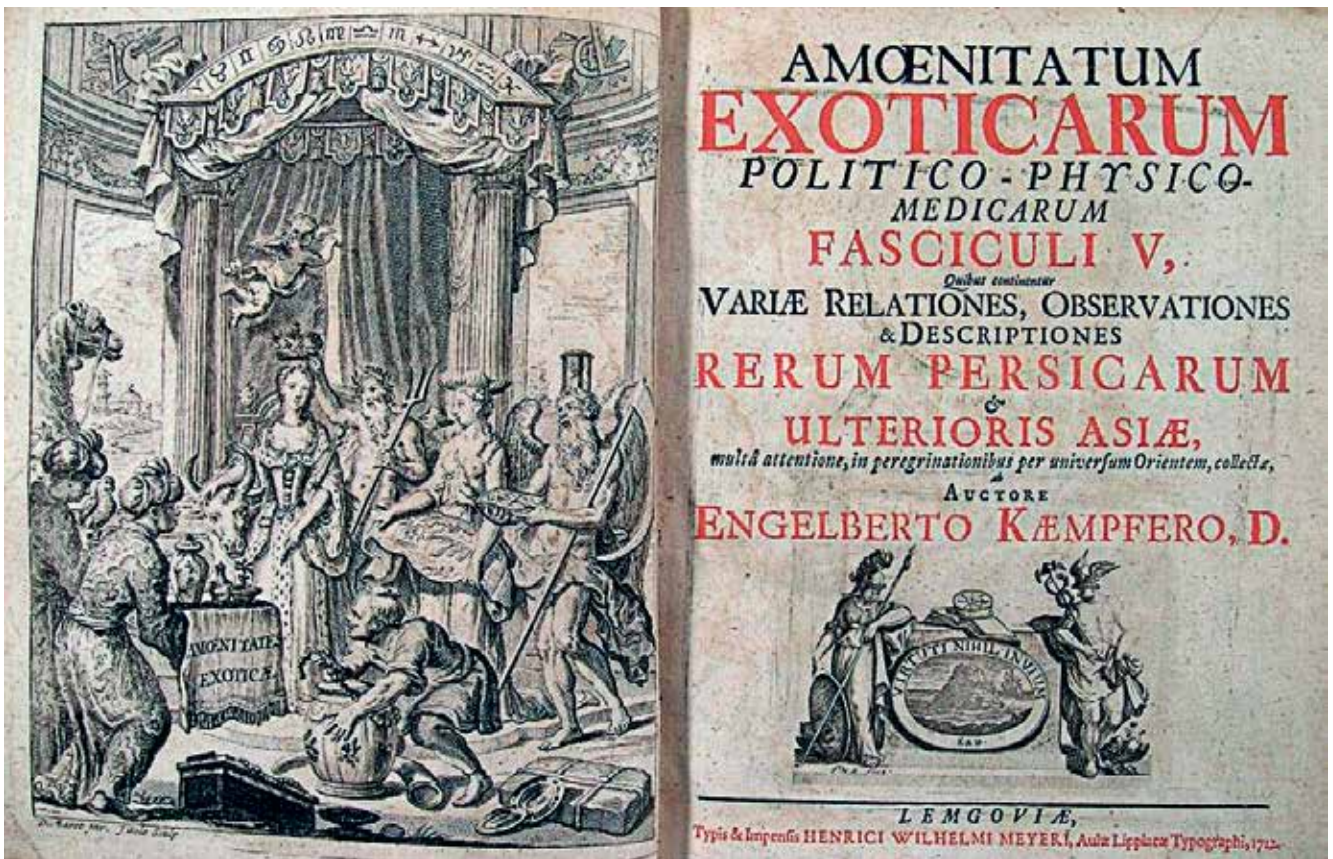
# ENGELBERT KAEMPFER'S INTERCULTURAL CONTACTS SHAMAKHI 1683-1684



**A**s secretary of a Swedish delegation to the court of Shah Suleyman, Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) travelled through what is today Azerbaijan for 77 days. He stayed in Shamakhi, the former capital of the Persian province of Shirvan, for four weeks, including his visit to Baku and the oil fields of Absheron. Not so well known are details of his stay in Shamakhi. His diary and book with five entries from Shamakhi in five languages give the names of seven of his local or foreign contacts - clerics of different nominations, military men and diplomats from different nations. Identifications of his contacts and details of their lives can be found in Kaempfer's "Amoenitates" and books by European and Persian travelers, Chardin, Tavernier and Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim. All this shows Shamakhi as an important place of intercultural contacts.

For 10 years from 1683 to 1692, German physician Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) travelled through parts of Russia, Persia, India, Siam, Japan and South Africa. First as secretary of a Swedish delegation he came to the court of the Persian Shah Suleyman. Later in the

*Engelbert Kaempfer*



Cover of E. Kaempfer's book on natural and political characteristics of the countries he visited. 1712

service of the Dutch trading company "Verenigde Oost-indische Compagnie" he traveled to Japan. His "History of Japan" published in London in 1727 was a reference book on Japan for more than a century.

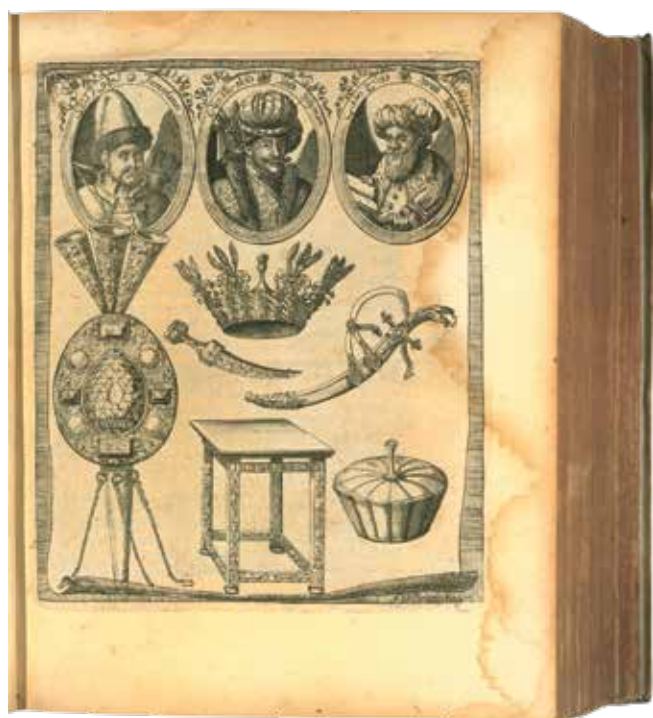
While visiting the Caspian region, he stayed at Niyazabad and in its vicinity for three days. On his way to Isfahan, he travelled through what is today Azerbaijan for a total of 77 days. He then proceeded to Shamakhi, the capital of the former Persian province of Shirvan. During his four weeks at Shamakhi, he undertook a six-day trip to Baku and the oil fields of Absheron.

He published his report of this trip in his "Amoenitatum exoticarum", or "Exotic Pleasures" report in 1712. This report is quite well-known in Azerbaijan and is frequently referred to in Russian literature. His books and papers are extensively referred to in the "History of Baku" by Sara Ashurbayli written in 1998. It contains more than 30 quotations from Kaempfer. His view of Baku of 1712 is quite often reproduced, mostly in a slightly simplified and colored version from about 1730, as can be seen on the cover of Chingiz Qajar's "Old Baku" from 2009. We will now have a closer look at Kaempfer's stay in Shamakhi.

**Kaempfer in Shamakhi.** Unlike his report on Baku, he doesn't give a printed report of his stay in this town in December 1683-January 1684. But while describing the geology of the mountain with the Gulistan fortress, he depicts a less well-known view of Shamakhi in 1712. Always very much interested in historical monuments, he visited Gulistan and the mountain to its right with old burial places.

Details of his stay in Shamakhi can be found in his travel diary, today kept in the British Library London. This diary is written in a mixture of Latin and German, is in a slightly damaged condition and is in parts not decipherable. But it has a number of sketches of buildings and inscriptions. So it will be worth having a closer look at observations of his travels through Azerbaijan. As far as I can see, the greatest part of this diary was published in German by Karl Meier-Lemgo in 1968 but it has gone unnoticed in Azerbaijan.

Kaempfer's report on Shamakhi is not as detailed as the book by Adam Olearius, but contains his personal observations on an Islamic day of mourning and a detailed description of the dinner hosted by the



*Kaempfer's book allocates a significant place to his own sketches of political figures, natural and technical features of different countries*

governor in his residence. He mentions four caravanserais and describes slave trade taking place in one of them. His description of Gulistan and old burial places is fairly detailed.

**Maheb Aali Molla.** When Kaempfer explored the town, he also visited mosques and schools. And here is the report of one such visit in his diary. Some lines in this typical mixture of Latin and German have been translated into English:

Maheb Aali Molla in Kaempfer's 1683-1684 diary and Olearius' book from 1663.

"In one of them I spoke to a quick and cheery man, perhaps of 70 to 80 years of age, who also wrote his name on my box. He had taught Olearius the fundamentals of the Arabic language and said that Oljars – as he called him – had been a brave man but had not yet completely understood the fundamentals of the Arabic language. Olearius remembers him..."

Kaempfer had the travel book by Olearius to Isfahan with him, perhaps the edition of 1665. When visiting Shamakhi in February 1637 (and again on 21 February 1638), Olearius wrote in translation: "The Molla (teacher) of this school had the name of Maheb Aali. He was a young, merry and religious man and showed good friendship and service to me with learning the language."

Those two descriptions of this man fit perfectly with respect to place, characterization and age – we can as-

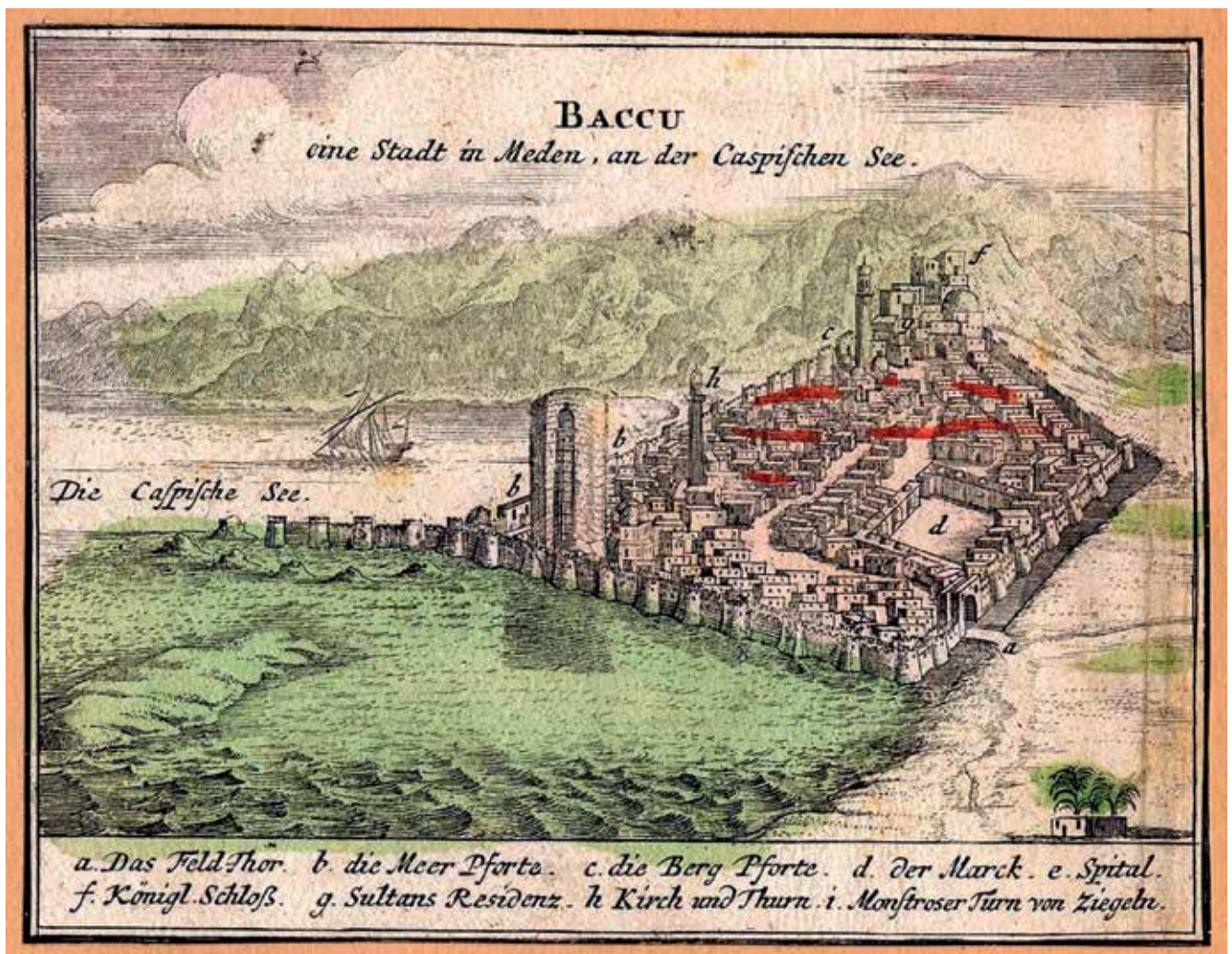
sume that both men met Mullah Maheb Ali but Kaempfer did that almost 47 years later. Some lines later Olearius says that he was taught "their language". Kaempfer was told "the Arabic language". Is this a misunderstanding? When Olearius and Kaempfer arrived in Shamakhi, both of them had no knowledge of Arabic-script languages. Later Olearius differentiated between Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages, while Kaempfer spoke Persian, had Turkish grammar and German, French, Latin, Turkish and Persian dictionaries. Because of Olearius' mention of "their language", there is a good chance that in reality he learned the fundamentals of Azeri in 1637.

**Priest Arakhel.** For 20 years (1674 to 1694), Kaempfer carried a liber amicorum with him, today at Lippische Landesbibliothek Detmold. From the start of his studies until his return to Europe, he presented this autograph book to people he met and asked for an entry. It has more than 130 of them, in 25 scripts and languages. With the help of many linguists, Karl Meier-Lemgo succeeded in editing a translation into German in 1952. For this paper I have made use of this translation.

And this precious book contains five entries directly relating to Shamakhi. I will follow them according to their date of writing. These pages never been published before. The first is written by an Armenian priest who introduces himself as "Arakhel".

The date he gives is Epiphany (Christmas), 6 January, Friday, Armenian year 1133. Due to the difference in calendars in use – Kaempfer always uses the old style calendar, the Julian – I will follow this use in order to compare them with entries in his diary. The given date transformed to the Julian calendar is 27 December 1683. It can't be 6 January 1684 according to Julian calendar because on this day Kaempfer was in Baku. It seems plausible that Kaempfer witnessed an Armenian service, because Kaempfer, in spite of being a very religious man of Protestant denomination, will have attended a Christian service on Christmas. The main text of Arakhel's entry is a rendition of the "Ave Maria", one of the most important prayers of Christianity.

It seems to include a prayer: "God, relieve us of our pains". Does this show a priest? On the other hand, he mentions that "I saw physician Engelbert Kaempfer". The mention of the physician and the condition of the entry could mean that he was sick and Kaempfer saw him as a patient.



*Baku on a drawing by E. Kaempfer*

We will find other cases of Kaempfer pursuing his medical profession on the journey.

It might be possible that this Martiros is identical with Martiros, bishop and father superior of the Meysari Armenian monastery, who wrote letters to the Russian commander of Derbend 40 years later in February-March 1724, asking for help against Ottoman-Turkish troops.

**Mohammed Hossein Beg.** The day when Kaempfer returned from his trip to Baku, he got a third entry in his *liber amicorum*.

The writer gives his name as Mohammed Hossein Beg, envoy; and Kaempfer adds: "Persian envoy to the Polish king". The date is Safar 1<sup>st</sup>, that is 9 January 1684 of Julian calendar. After some compliments to Kaempfer, Mohammed Hossein informs Kaempfer about the good state of his own health and wants to reassure him of his respect. That is a clear indication that he had

been Kaempfer's patient – one of many in Shamakhi, as Kaempfer states at the beginning of his report about a visit to Baku:

This Mohammed Hossein Beg can be found in contemporary literature. Jean Chardin, well-known traveler and trader in jewels, went from Isfahan to Qazvin, where the Shah was in residence, in May 1675. On this way, he was accompanied by "Mohammed Hussein Beg". This young man had come from Bahrein, where his father Mohammed Poquerbec Sultan was governor. Chardin describes him as a high-spirited and courteous man.

His subsequent fate is known from a report of the Persian Embassy to the court of King Narai of Siam/Thailand at Ayutthaya in 1685, written by secretary Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim. At that time, "Muhammad Hus-sain Beg" held a position at the *khäşşa*, the administrator of the Shah's immediate properties. He was appointed



*City of Shamakhi on a drawing by E. Kaempfer*

Ambassador and then fell ill already at the Persian Gulf departure port Bandar-e Abbas in June 1685 (Kaempfer fell ill at Bandar-Abbas in 1686, too). He suffered much during the voyage across the sea and after landing at the coast of today's Myanmar-Burma, was afflicted with dropsy. The two doctors sent by the Siamese king could not help. Mohammed Hossein Beg died in Tenasserim on 19 December 1685.

**Konstantin Christophorov.** It was already on the following day when Kaempfer received the next entry – four pages, of which the first was in Greek and the other three in Russian. The second Russian page is reproduced here.

The author gives his name as Konstantin Christophorov, nobleman, envoy and interpreter of Greek and Italian languages, in the service of the Imperial Majesties [of Russia]. He writes these lines as a sign of friendship to honorable physician Engelbert Kaempfer. The date shown is Somakia [Shamakhi], 10 January 1684, Julian calendar.

The Greek text and the main part of the Russian text contain a Bible quotation: "The physician shall lift up his head, and in the sight of great men he shall be in admiration". Another sentence says, "when we call for a physician, we shall not give up our hope in God". These repeated references to Kaempfer's profession might indicate that the Russian envoy Christophorov had been his patient too.

Kaempfer will have met Christophorov for the first time when the Russian delegation landed in Niyazabad on the same day as Kaempfer's Swedish delegation. Both delegations had to wait for three weeks and together they proceeded to Shamakhi. In Shamakhi, both delegations seem to have lived in the houses of Armenians for four weeks. Kaempfer and Christophorov

both attended a dinner hosted by the governor on 29 December 1683. At this time the friendship between these two men grew. They spoke the same language – Christophorov being a born Greek and Kaempfer having learned Greek at school. On the last evening before leaving Shamakhi they had a going-away party where Kaempfer got rather merry.

The two men later met in Isfahan in 1684 and 1685 and took part in audiences granted by Shah Suleyman. In the Persia part of his book, Kaempfer gave a detailed report of a magnificent "New Year audience" – probably in December 1684.

The first lines describe Christophorov's introduction to this audience. He continues: "His diplomatic missions suffered from bad luck. Three years ago, he was sent to the Turkish Emperor and lost 150 of his companions due to a fatal illness when crossing the Black Sea. Later he died himself after being poisoned by his secretary. It was a slowly working poison and the crime was detected. He had the murderer and a boy who knew about it laid upon a pyre in the walled part of his garden to be burned alive. That was one day before he himself died, 40 years of age. He was a highly learned man in Greek and worthy of a longer life, a friend to me."

I could not find any more about him in literature independent from Kaempfer. Russian diplomatic archives might offer more, especially the place and year of Christophorov's death.

**Kaempfer's diary of 13 January 1684 and his letter of 25 November 1687.** Under the heading "From Shamakhi to the province of Mochan" it deals with his last three days at Shamakhi in January 1684. The first part of the first line is to be translated as "on 13 January I was visiting my patient Nawi Yusbascy Butari". But because Kaempfer's used abbreviations at the end of words, it can't be decided if it concerns one or more patients. "Nawi" seems to be a personal name, "Yusbascy" is the military rank of captain, "Butari" might be a geographic term later Kaempfer crossed a small river named "Butaru" on 23 January. So this would mean that he was talking about captain Nawi born near Butaru.

The next words might read as "shengfflauten" which haven't been interpreted so far. The last part of this line is to be translated as "Hafi Saburjan on a journey on a white horse worth 80 to 100 Reichstaler was presented". The main part is clear: Kaempfer was given a white horse of high value. But "Hafi Saburjan" remains vague: Is "Hafi"

a Persian name Hafis? Is “Saburjan” an Armenian family name? Is “Hafi Saburjan” an addition to “Nawi Yusbascy Butari” or does it give the name of a second person?

This remains unresolved. Kaempfer himself mentioned this event nearly three years later in a letter to his brother Joachim, written in Bandar-e’Abbas on 25 November 1687 (Gregorian calendar). It says “... departed [from Shamakhi with earnings of 100 Taler in cash and the present of a white horse of the same value.”

There is a fifth and last entry in Kaempfer’s *liber amicorum* written in Shamakhi. The first two lines are written in Turkish, then the entry is continued in Persian. The translation reads: “An angle-shaped brought Ali Kuli/Gholi Chan, the servant/slave of Shah Suleyman, into the province of Shirvan. In the town Shamakhi on 8 Saffar 1095, a Tuesday, in the year of the pig.” The hejira date given is 16 January 1684 in the Julian calendar, which is in agreement with Kaempfer’s information about the day of his departure from Shamakhi, although Kaempfer says that it was a Wednesday. Kaempfer added to the page “Shamakhi” in ink and some information in German in pencil.

Any entry into a *liber amicorum* is expected to be written in one’s own hand (this one needs to be compared to his other writings). So this entry has to be regarded as the author’s own hand. It shows interesting features. It is written in two languages – Turkish and Persian. The writer gives only his name, not his position or function – evidently, he doesn’t deem it necessary. So we can identify the writer as the governor of the province of Shirvan himself.

Kaempfer reports in detail on a dinner hosted by the governor. He describes his residence, the people in attendance and the food served. He mentions the governor only in short terms, naming him the “Khan”, or “Viceroy”. He doesn’t give his name, age or any details of his appearance. He only finds it remarkable that the Khan sat on a European chair with his feet folded underneath.

Who was this Ali Kuli Khan? He calls himself as the “ghulam of Shah Suleyman” – the translation of ghulam as a servant or slave doesn’t cover the complete meaning of this word. By using the term Ghulam, he documents that he belongs to the great number of men who are bound to the Shah by strong and lasting loyalty. Many of them were members of the military, quite a few held high offices in Persia.

Among the men of this name we can find one with the added “Ghulam”. On a list ending with the reign of Shah Abbas II in 1666 as governor of Marv in north-



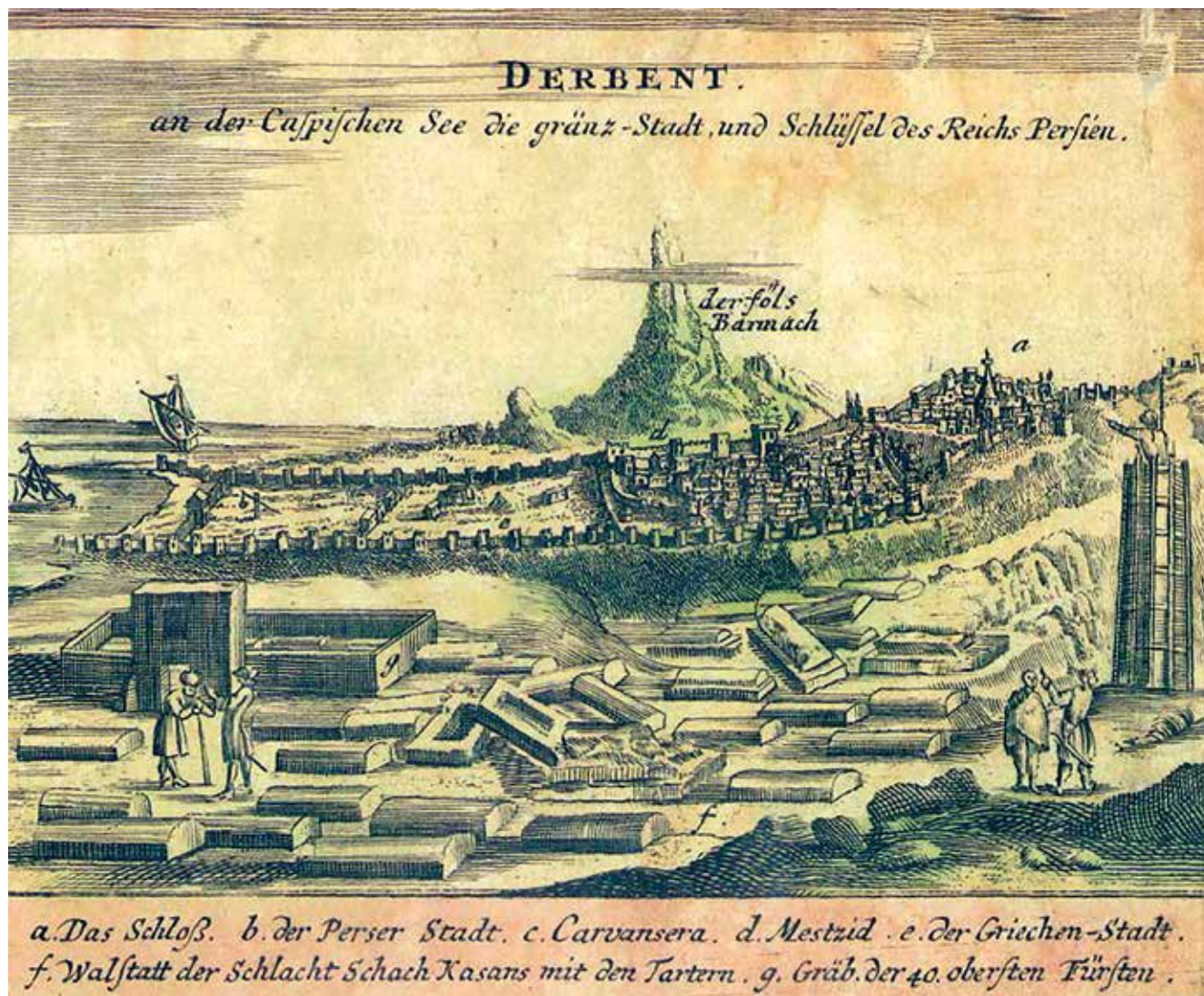
*E. Kaempfer was one of the first people to depict the Absheron peninsula*

eastern Persia in about 1645 and as governor of the province of Äzerbälğän around Tabriz but without the indication of the year is respect of a “sipahsälär”, or commander of the Persian army.

The large time difference of nearly 40 years between Marv 1645 and Shamakhi 1684 doesn’t contradict this attempt at identification, but it means that here in Shamakhi we will have to envisage a man of around 70 years of age.

The importance of being a sipahsälär has led Western travelers of the time to take notice of these men. Jean Chardin gives a detailed description of the events when “Haly-Kouli-Kaan” was banned by Shah Abbas II and came to power again under his successor Shah Suleyman. In addition to becoming commander-in-chief again, he was appointed governor of “Medien”, i.e. Äzerbälğän. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, who also was in Isfahan in 1667, gives a slightly different description of the events around “Ali-Couli-Kan”, saying that he was of Georgian descent:

Some caution is called for when dealing with these reports, but it can still be assumed that the two travelers talked about the same man as does the above-mentioned list. To finally prove the Shamakhi governor’s identity in 1684 one needs further sources to which I had no access. What can we learn from these rather accidental names?



*City of Derbent on a drawing by E. Kaempfer*

Traveler Engelbert Kaempfer, a Christian German in Swedish diplomatic service, came into contact with Muslim culture for the first time. As an academically educated physician, he made good use of his profession, as with Nawi Yusbascy, a born Azerbaijani, Mohammed Hossein and probably Martiros, perhaps Hafi Saburjan too. As a Christian living in Shamakhi within the Armenian quarter, he met other Christians, Priest Arakhel, the already mentioned Martiros and maybe Hafi Saburjan. Besides the Armenian priest Arakhel, he met a cleric of another religion, Maheb Aali, a Muslim Mullah, probably a born Azerbaijani who lived in Shamakhi. As a diplomat, he established good contacts with diplomats of other nations, such as Mohammed Hossein, a Persian and envoy to Poland, and his friend

Christophorov, a Greek in Russian service. There were contacts with persons of a military background too, including the already mentioned captain Nawi, ghulam Ali Kuli Khan, possibly a born Georgian, commander-in-chief under two Shahs, one of the most powerful men in Persia, and the governor of the province of Shirvan in 1684.

On the one hand all these Shamakhi contacts were surely a good start for Kaempfer's subsequent cultural experiences and attempts to understand foreign cultures in India, Siam and Japan. On the other hand, this shows that during those days Shamakhi was a meeting point between great empires and an important place of intercultural contacts on the European-Asian border. 🌱

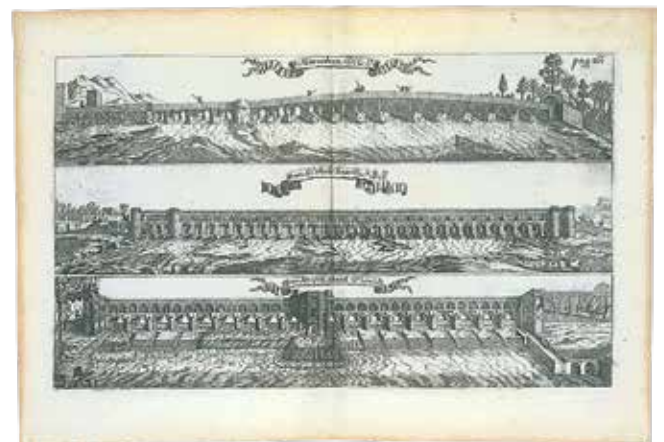
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2. Engelbert Kaempfer: *Amoenitatum exoticarum*. Lemgo. 1712; pp. 262-286. Sara Aşurbəyli: Bakı şəhərinin tarixi. Bakı: Azərneşr, 1998.
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5. Adam Olearius: *Auszuehrliche Beschreibung der kundbaren Reyse nach Muscow und Persien*. 3rd ed. Schleswig 1663; pp. 423-447, 713-716.
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8. Kaempfer's *liber amicorum*; fol. 244v.
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14. Kaempfer's diary; fol. 60v.
15. Kaempfer: *Amoenitatum ...*; p. 239.
16. Kaempfer's diary; fol. 62r.
17. Engelbert Kaempfer: *Geschichte und Beschreibung Japans*. Vol. I. Lemgo 1777; p. xx. Kaempfer's *liber amicorum*; fol. 30v.
18. K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts of the Academy of Science of Georgia shows in its "Catalogue of Persian and Persian-Georgian Documents" a "Ali-Kuli Khan's private letter to Mohammad Hossein-beg, XVIIth century", <<http://www.persian-doc.org.ge/catalogue.html>>; Pd 202; May 2010 to March 2011.
19. Because of both the two names and for comparison it would have been of interest for this paper. Klaus-Michael Röhrborn: *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966; pp. 34f.
20. Jean Chardin: *Beschreibung der Krönung Soliman-*



*Eastern musical instruments.  
Drawing by E. Kaempfer*

21. Jean Baptiste Tavernier: *Beschreibung der sechs Reisen ... in Tiirckey, Persien und Indien ... Erster Teil*. Genff: Widerhold, 1681; pp. 250-252.
22. The title illustration shows Engelbert Kaempfer, drawing the ruins of Persepolis in December 1685 (detail of plate to p. 334, Kaempfer Lemgo 1712).



*E. Kaempfer was also interested in the architecture of different countries. This drawing shows different types of bridges*