# Sugar trade in the Eighteenth-Century Persian Gulf

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## Chapter 1: The Sugar Consumer Market

During the Safavid period, as historians point out, sugar became an indispensable consumable in the court circle and major cities in Iran, accompanied by a development of sugar supplies from the Persian Gulf. But little is known about the sugar consumer market after the fall of the Safavids. Was there any change in its nature from the previous phase? What was the relationship between the sugar market and its supply during the eighteenth century? To answer these questions, the most important source is to be found in accounts left by Europeans who visited Iran and bordering countries during that time. The accounts include many references to the consumers of sugar those travellers encountered there. As is often the case, the writers were not familiar with the local society, and their interests were highly diverse for they had ulterior motives. Nevertheless, by collecting their fragmentary anecdotes it becomes possible to show a general picture of the sugar consumer market over time.

### 1. Safavid period

#### Localities of consumers

What is important about the place of sugar in Safavid Iran is that sugar supplies through the Gulf by no means diminished local sweeteners such as honey, dates, grapes, manna, etc. Almost all travellers who visited Iran in the Safavid period commented not only on the abundance of fruits in the country, but also on how important they were for the population's daily diet. John Fryer, an Englishman who stayed in Iran from 1676–77, related that the primary diet of the Iranians was fruit, and that no country was more taken with sweetmeats, not even the Lusitanians.[1]

One could assume that the secret of the popularity of sugar lies in the fact that sugar combined itself with some other traditional sweetener, particularly fruit. In Safavid Iran, sherbets were known to be made from various sorts of fruit juice, such as pomegranate or citron. When sugar was added to them greater variation was achieved.[2] Matthee points out the development of the tradition of entertaining honoured guests with decorative sweetmeats called a "sugar banquet", alongside coffee and a water pipe. This was in the late seventeenth century; earlier, according to European eyewitnesses, "conserves" had a prominent place in customary feasting.[3] Jan Smidt, visiting Iran as an ambassador of the States-General and the VOC in the last part of the reign of Abbas I (r. 1588–1629), explained the manner of "Persian banquets" that he had encountered:

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[1] J. Fryer, *A New Account of East-India and Persia, in VIII Letters: Being Nine Years Travels, Begun 1672 and Finished 1681* (London: R.R. for Ri. Chiswell, 1698), 293, 405.
[2] J. Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse, et autres lieux de l'Orient*, edited by L. Langlès, vol. 4 (Paris: Le Normant, 1811), 44-5.
[3] R. Matthee, "A Sugar Banquet for the Shah: Anglo-Dutch Competition at the Iranian Court of Šāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1694–1722)," *Eurasian Studies*, 1-2 (2006): 195-217.

> The time of their [Persian] gathering is around 10 o'clock in the morning. The sitting places are all down on the ground which is covered with carpets and excellent tapestries. They sit in the manner of tailors in our country because people have no idea about table here. This manner is quite difficult for those who are not accustomed to it.
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> Firstly, when people enter the square room, in the place where the guests will sit, fruits and (after the harvest season) some bottles of wine are placed. From the beginning to the end [wine] is usually passed around, since the serving of wine to each is unusual, and even if it happens, wine is passed around. Sometime after having sat in the manner, around noon a "breakfast" (*ontbijt*) chiefly consisting of conserves (*confituren*) and sugar (*zoetigheid*) is dished out. After half an hour it is taken away and people again sit for a while. Around 2 to 3 o'clock the meal (*maaltijd*) is laid on. The banquets are indeed very luxurious but not beautiful with few variations of food, for they cook all their food with rice. […]. The plates in which food was served are generally so big as the bottom of a tap. At the table where the ambassador [Smidt] sat were placed 40 gold dishes of this size in which food was served for more than 200 people, so their luxuriousness mainly comes from the quantity of food. The food is later served to each servant of the guests according to his status, because the Persians are very liberal in treating the servants of their guests.
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> After having sat for about one to one and a half hours as before, the tables are removed and the guests are given warm hand-water to wash their hands well, because everything is very messy over the meal, for people were tearing food by hand, and not using spoons or knives much. After the food has been cleared away, the Persians may stay for another two to three hours, when some dancers are called into the middle of the room. The Persians enjoyed their dance and singing very much while continuously drinking.[4]

Probably not all "conserves" were prepared with cane sugar, considering that the population not only knew how to make them without using sugar but were also skilled in processing "sugar" from other substances, such as grapes and dates.[5] However, it seems reasonable to envisage "conserves" as having a social life influenced by the geographical spatial scope in which cane sugar came to play a part over time. While Smidt experienced it during his travel from Bandar Abbas through Shiraz to the capital city of Isfahan, Pietro Della Valle, an Italian noble who came from Baghdad to Isfahan in 1617, witnessed a similar order of ceremonial diet. When he arrived at Hamadan, a western access to Safavid Iran, he described the service of fruits, wine (coffee was served for Della Valle because he could not drink wine), conserves (if one was a guest of the kings and rulers), pilaf, etc., at a Persian

[4] Nationaal Archief (NA) Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC)1100, diary, J. Smidt, fols. 301r-v.
[5] Shiraz, for instance, produced preserves with grapes and vinegar. J. Thévenot, *Suite du Voyage de Levant*, vol. 2 (Paris: Charles Angot, 1674), 243-4. For the ways of extracting sugar from grapes and dates, G.A. Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman, l'Égypte et la Perse*, vol. 5 (Paris: H. Agasse, 1801–7), 283; J. Taylor, *Travels from England to India, in the Year 1789 by Way of the Tyrol, Venice, Scandaroon, Aleppo, and over the Great Desart to Bussora*, vol. 2 (London: S. Low, 1799), 211, 220.

banquet that was fit for all the great and the good and even for the king.[6] Adam Olearius, a German secretary to the Holstein mission coming to Safavid Iran through the northern frontier zone of the Caspian coastlands during the late 1630s, also commented that the ruler of Shamakhi invited the mission to his banquet where he offered them all kinds of conserves (*allerhand Konfect*).[7]

As many scholars point out, the Safavid court represented a large portion of the sugar consumption in the country. VOC officials noted in 1660 that the king spent almost a year in his retreat at Ashraf in Mazandaran "with an unbelievably large following, including most of the grandees, who all are wont to indulge in a rather dissolute life, and who account for the largest part of sugar consumption." During this period, market prices in Isfahan dropped, as traders did not dare to go there. Once the court returned to the city, the price of sugar promptly rose.[8] In 1703, a Dutch painter Cornelis de Bruyn noted that, in return for royal silk, the VOC sent the court 1.8 million Dutch pounds of sugar every year, which was all consumed in Isfahan.[9] The travelling "tent" was akin to a mobile centre for consumption. Fryer revealed that when any "magistrate" returned from hunting or entered or left a major town or city people of all classes marked the occasion with a liberal consumption of tobacco, tea, coffee, rosewater, and sugar candy.[10]

While sugar was in demand in cities along the major supply line of maritime sugar, stretching from Bandar Abbas to Isfahan, it is likely that those cities, especially Isfahan, also functioned as distribution centres for sugar in Iran and beyond. The scarcity of available information renders it difficult to identify precisely how much sugar was redistributed from the capital to a particular destination. However, it seems true that some portions of imported sugar were meant for northern and eastern cities in the late Safavid period. Traders from Qazvin and Tabriz usually bought maritime sugar at the Isfahan market.[11] In Shamakhi in the early 1680s a German naturalist, Engelbert Kaempfer, was served with conserves (*Konfect*), fruits, sweetmeats (*eine Schüssel mit Zuckermandeln, worunter sich roter und weißer Zucker befand*), and tea.[12] De Bruyn saw sugar sellers (*suikerverkopers*) active in the bazaar of Kashan.[13] In the eastern part of Safavid Iran Mashhad imported sugar and coffee from Isfahan during the last part of the seventeenth century.[14] Though not well-documented it is probable that Iraq, another sugar-consuming region, imported sugar from Isfahan (if not from Basra).

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[6] P. Della Valle, *Der voortreffelyke reizen van de deurluchtige reiziger, Pietro Della Valle, edelman van Romen*, translated by J. Glazemaker, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: A. Wolfgang and J. Rieuwertsz., 1664), 81-4.
[7] A. Olearius, *Vermehrte newe Beschreibung der Muscowitischen und Persischen Reise* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1971), 423-6.
[8] R. Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City Bandar Abbas and the Persian Gulf (ca. 1600–1680): A Study of Selected Aspects," (PhD diss., University of London, 1993–94), 393.
[9] C. de Bruyn, *Reizen over Moskovië door Persië en Indië* (Amsterdam: Rudolph en Gerard Wetstein, Joannes Oosterwyk, Hendrik van de Gaete, 1714), 176.
[10] Fryer, *A New Account of East-India*, 398.
[11] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 404.
[12] E. Kaempfer, *Die Reisetagebücher Engelbert Kaempfers*, edited by K. Meier-Lemgo (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1968), 45.
[13] De Bruyn, *Reizen over Moskovië*, 131.
[14] R. Matthee, "Politics and Trade in Late Safavid Iran: Commercial Crisis and Government Reaction under Shah Solayman (1666–1694)," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1991), 394-5.

Some of this might have been re-exported to Ottoman markets in the Middle East and Anatolia, since the VOC reported in the early seventeenth century that the Turks were also seeking sugar, while the Arabs consumed little.[15]

Apart from the king and the grandees, women at home had a significant place in Iran's sugar consumption. A VOC resident, Reynier Casembroot, reported in 1682 that "the principal treat Persians use to offer at all respectable meals and invitations, both before and after midday, consists of sugar confectionary and costly candied sweets; besides, many sweets are consumed in private homes, especially by women."[16] Hosts of domestic servants in houses of the great also accounted for a substantial part of the country's "luxury".[17] Later, a Muscovy Company merchant, Jonas Hanway, lamented that his guests took little of the sweetmeats that he had served, but gave the remainder to their servants. They were often so numerous that a treat of this kind would cost 10 or 12 crowns, and this custom, being absurd and expensive to him, had "something of the air of hospitality in the person entertaining."[18]

There appears to have been no official ethnic barrier to sugar consumption in Safavid Iran, as there was with liquor and wine. The "Iranian" customary treat of sweetmeats was also common among "foreign" residents including the Julfa Armenians, the *Banian*s, etc.[19] As in many other sugar-consuming countries, "morality" mattered little. That *qalandar*s (ascetics) reprimanded the pomp of cooks, bakers, *qannādī*s (jam makers), etc. in the mid-seventeenth century actually proves the intensity of consumption in the cities of those days.[20] For the population in rural areas, however, sugar was a quite unfamiliar item until the mid-nineteenth century. By then increasing supplies, from Java, France, and later Russia, gradually put it within reach of lower segments of society.[21] However, some particular uses of sugar might have been "trickling down" somewhat earlier. The wide popularity of sherbet in Safavid Iran provides a good example. In the *Tadhkira al-mulūk*, the early eighteenth-century manual of Safavid administrative practices, the sherbet house (*sharba-khāna*) is shown as one of the royal workshops, and the chief officer *ṣāḥib* is described as the person who took care of the belongings of the department: vessels of gold, silver, china, glass and copper; as well as crystal sugar (*shikar*), candy sugar (*qand*), medicinal herbs, coffee, tobacco, as well as lemon

[15] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 393; W.Ph. Coolhaas (ed.), *Generale missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heeren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (1639–55)*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 39.
[16] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 392.
[17] Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin*, vol. 4, 22.
[18] J. Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea with a Journal of Travels from London through Russia into Persia, and back again through Russia, Germany, and Holland*, vol.1 (Dublin: William Smith and Richard James, 1754), 144-5.
[19] The powerful Armenian family Sarhad entertained Chardin in Julfa on his departure for Bandar Abbas. Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin*, vol. 8, 178-90. For the treat of "sugar banquet" (*suikerbanket*) by the VOC's *Banian* brokers at Bandar Abbas, De Bruyn, *Reizen over Moskovië*, 405.
[20] R. Du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1890), 216.
[21] R. Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 256. A. Lambton notes that tea and sugar were the only luxuries to the peasant but does not indicate the source. A. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 389.

juice, rosewater, spirits, etc.[22] But Kaempfer, the German naturalist referred to earlier, noted that sherbet was equally popular both "in huts and palaces" (*in aulis et caulis*).[23] Besides, the proximity to major trading routes probably to some extent compensated for sugar's relatively high price. The VOC noted that one poor toll collector (*rāhdār*) in charge of an almost neglected village relied on the tribute of spices, pepper, and candy sugar from caravans passing through his village.[24]

**Different sugar varieties**

During the Safavid period, various sugar-producing countries, including Northwest India, South China, Taiwan, Bengal, Oman and Java, catered for Iran's consumers. After the establishment of Safavid rule in the Iranian littoral of the Persian Gulf in the 1620s, those countries sent considerable volumes of sugar to the Gulf, especially to the Safavid royal port of Bandar Abbas. Usually they exported different types of sugar including castor or powdered sugar, loaf sugar, and candy sugar to Iran. Due to the scarcity of available information it is hardly possible to comprehend the relations between different varieties of sugar in the consumer market, yet it is a worthwhile task to challenge.

In an analysis of wholesale prices of powdered sugars and candy sugars, from Hindustan, Bengal and China (including Taiwan), at Bandar Abbas in the seventeenth century, Klein suggests that the eventual sale price was determined by the total supply, and that all varieties competed with one another for market share.[25] He admits, however, that the character and quality of sugar varied considerably depending on the producing country. Such differences combined with the people's taste preferences created an intriguing situation in which some varieties were employed for particular purposes for which others were not used regularly. In other words, all varieties were not always in outright competition. After the establishment of their trading station in Bandar Abbas in 1623, the VOC increased sales of Taiwanese sugar, the import of which they had controlled until they delivered up Taiwan to Cheng forces in 1662.[26] Other suppliers also became active in trading Bengali sugar towards the mid-century. Muslim and Hindu merchants and officials of the Golconda dynasty (1512–1687) exported considerable amounts of the variety to Iran.[27] According to the Dutch, however, the increased trade in Bengali sugar was not necessarily harmful to their trade in Taiwanese sugar. They wrote in 1650 that Taiwanese sugar could be used for all the purposes for which Bengali sugar was not suitable.[28]

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[22] Anon. *Tadhkirat al-mulūk: A Manual of Ṣafavid Administration (circa 1137/1725)*, translated by V. Minorsky (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1943), 68-9 (English translation), 52 (manuscript).
[23] E. Kaempfer, *Am Hofe des persischen Grosskönings (1684–5): Das erste Buch der Amoenitates exoticae*, translated by W. Hintz (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler Verlag, 1940), 118; Idem, *Amoenitatum exoticarum politico-physico-medicarum fasciculi V: quibus continentur variae relationes, observationes et descriptiones rerum Persicarum et ulterioris Asiae* (Lemgoviae: Typis & impensis Henrici Wilhelmi Meyeri, 1712), 121-2.
[24] NA VOC2448, diary, J. Brand, Bandar Abbas to Isfahan, pp. 1559-60.
[25] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 377.
[26] W. Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2000), 127-8, 131.
[27] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 376-82.
[28] Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 131.

It seems likely that Taiwanese sugar was used in the preparation of sherbet and vied with Omani loaf sugar for domination in this particular process. Soon after the Dutch were expelled from Taiwan, the Omani variety significantly enhanced its status in the Iranian market. In Oman, sugar cane was cultivated in the oases surrounding the interior settlements of Bahla, Manah, Nizwa, etc. By the mid-1670s the production of sugar as an export commodity came under the strict control of the Yarubi imamate (1624/25– c. 1720). Large portions of the output were destined for Iran via Masqat or other harbours of Oman.[29] The Dutch factors wrote that Omani loaf sugar was used for making refreshing drinks, such as sherbet, while Bengali sugars (except the Sirpur variety) were employed for candied sweets.[30] Under these circumstances, the VOC turned to Bengali sugar.

In the 1680s the VOC gradually shifted the pivot of their sugar trade towards Javanese sugar produced in the environs (*ommelanden*) of Batavia. Although Floor contests that Javanese sugar came to dominate the Iranian sugar market by 1680 and that this continued till the end of the eighteenth century, its relations with other varieties of sugar were very complex.[31] The Dutch usually imported two types of Javanese sugar to Iran: what they called *poedersuiker* (castor sugar), and *kandijsuiker* (candy sugar). Dutch candy sugar was in direct competition with Masqati loaf sugar (*Masquetse broodsuiker*). Masqati sugar, which was melted and refined into loaf and candy sugar (*brood- en kandijsuiker*) in Isfahan and used for the preparation of sherbets and other refreshing and invigorating drinks, was more suitable for these processes than the Javanese variety, because it did not lose much weight after the refinement, as if it "has some sugar in itself" (*in zichzelfs enige zoetigheid*).[32] Moreover, the Iranians had begun to "imitate" (*namaken*) Javanese candy sugar since the turn of the eighteenth century.[33]

However, it seems that Dutch castor sugar succeeded in developing its "own" market. In 1695, when the VOC decided to give up the still lucrative trade in Bengali sugar in Iran in order to enhance sales of Javanese sugar, the Company's brokers in Bandar Abbas advised them to continue to import Bengali (castor) sugar. The import of Javanese sugar would not hinder the trade in Bengali sugar, they claimed, because in the Safavid realm Bengali sugar was consumed in a different manner from Batavia castor sugar (*tot een ander gebruik dan de Batavia poedersuiker verorbert en geconsummeert werd*). In fact, although the VOC had not imported Bengali sugar for the few years previously while they were importing large amounts of Javanese castor sugar, the Bengali shipping of sugar remained active and the English, the Armenian, the Muslim and other local merchants sold the Bengali variety even more and for good prices.[34] One year later, VOC officials reported that Bengali and Javanese sugars were used for different processes in the preparation of sugar banquets (*ieder tot een bijzonder gebruik bij de suikerbanquet verarbeid worden*). Quoting a Dutch proverb, "The abundance of rye makes the price of wheat drop" (*de overvloed van rogge de prijs der tarwe doet dalen*),

[29] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 406.
[30] Idem, 408-9.
[31] W. Floor, "Sugar," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, updated 20 July 2009.
[32] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 408-9; NA VOC1559, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 2 August 1693, fols. 715v-6r.
[33] NA VOC1603, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 1 July 1699, fol. 1863r.
[34] NA VOC1571, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 24 June 1695, pp. 105-7.

they said that the large imports of Bengali sugar could reduce the price of Javanese castor sugar but could not decrease its sales.[35]

However, the suggested comparison between "wheat" and "rye" would seem to prove that Javanese castor sugar and Bengali castor sugar were to some extent "interchangeable", whereas the former developed its own appeal in Iran. There consumers could decide which to choose according to the price. These varieties actually influenced each another in terms of wholesale prices. Javanese castor sugar generally fetched higher prices than Bengali sugar, which was probably the motive behind the VOC decision to switch to the Javanese variety. The Company sent small quantities of Bengali sugar as ballast goods in the financial years 1706–07 and 1707–08.[36] According to the Dutch annual sales statements (*rendementen*) for these years, Bandar Abbas sold the Bengali castor sugar at 2 ¼ *maḥmūdī*s per *man*, while they sold Javanese castor sugar at 2 ¾ *maḥmūdī*s per *man*. For 1707–08 Bengali castor sugar yielded only 42 per cent net profit, while for Javanese castor sugar they gained 103 per cent profit.[37] Keeping this in mind, it would not be surprising that sales of Bengali sugar at Bandar Abbas had a tendency to pull the wholesale price of the VOC castor sugar down, making projected sales targets of Javanese sugar more difficult for the Company to meet.[38]

What is intriguing is that sales of "fancy" Dutch castor sugar also had an adverse effect on the price of its Bengali counterpart. The trade at Bandar Abbas in the financial year 1705–06 provides an illuminating account of this. In July 1706, the Dutch factors wrote that for the last two years they had not sold many goods, because the English had cornered the market for all kinds of goods. They said it was in order to stop other traders from continuing to prevail in this year that they made the decision to sell their principal weighed goods (*pondgoederen*) such as castor sugar, candy sugar, pepper, tin, etc., immediately after these goods were unloaded from the ships that had reached Iran in October and December 1705. In response to this sudden move the English also had to sell their very well-refined and white Chinese sugar quickly, and that variety managed to fetch a price of 2 ¾ *maḥmūdī*s per *man*. Four English ships that arrived from Bengal and China some time later were obliged to sell imported Bengali and Chinese sugars mixed together (*die zoetigheid door den anderen ongesorteerd*) at a lower price of 2 *maḥmūdī*s per *man*. Furthermore, a Danish ship which docked with both their own goods and freight goods from Bengal in May 1706 also had to dispose of Bengali sugar at 2 *maḥmūdī*s per *man*. The English could not sell all their sugar and other goods at Bandar Abbas and they began to send some to Isfahan by caravan. This reduced the prices of all the competitors' sugars. As a result, as the Dutch officers noted, the price of the Chinese sugar mentioned earlier was ¼ *maḥmūdī* cheaper than the VOC price, and the price for which

[35] NA VOC1564, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 15 May 1696, fols. 1772r-v.
[36] The VOC's financial year begins on 1 September and ends on 31 August in the following year.
[37] NA VOC1763, annual sales statement, Bandar Abbas, 1706–07, pp. 336-41; VOC1753, annual sales statement, 1707–08, Bandar Abbas, fols. 280v-3r. For the wholesale prices of those varieties during the period 1646–88, see Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 396-400.
[38] NA VOC1564, letter from Bandar Abbas to The Netherlands, 14 June 1696, fol. 1755v.

the English and the Danish sold their sugars was 1 *maḥmūdī* cheaper (i.e. the VOC sold their castor sugar at 3 *maḥmūdī*s per *man*).[39]

Whether true or not, Javanese castor sugar was in high demand in Iran as it was well-refined, and the Company tried to maintain a steady supply of quality castor sugar for the Iranian market so that its particular appeal would not waver. In 1694 it was recorded that in Bandar Abbas the quality of sugar sent from Batavia had become worse year after year since 1688, when the Dutch ship *de Grote Visserij* had imported excellently refined and very white castor sugar. If they had received such a quality product, they claimed, they would have been sure to sell five to six thousand chests of it every year. But if the quality continued to deteriorate they might not be able to sell three thousand chests of castor sugar or to maintain its recent price.[40] Wholesale merchants in Iran expected the VOC to bring well-processed sugar to the market. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the Company tried offering unrefined muscovado sugar (*muscovade suiker*) alongside castor sugar and managed to sell it at 1.5 *maḥmūdī*s per *man-i Tabrīz* (equivalent to 6 Dutch pounds), which was half the price of castor sugar. However, a Dutch report relates that the merchants disliked the raw sugar, saying it would be the last time they would buy unrefined sugar from the Dutch.[41] The merchants who traded with the VOC primarily aimed at procuring Javanese castor sugar from the Company. In 1717 the Dutch ambassador Joan Josua Ketelaar instructed the Bandar Abbas factors to dispose of the remaining spices that were low in demand at that time and add sugar, especially castor sugar, because the item was strongly favoured in Iran.[42]

Klein points out that towards the mid-1680s Iran's growing cash shortage reduced the import of ocean-going sugar for cheaper local fructose produced from grapes and dates. Even so, it seems that many seafaring merchants who carried on trading with the Gulf in the 1690s did not suffer too much in terms of their sales of well-processed sugar.[43] It is quite likely that the Dutch project to provide the market with their castor sugar stimulated other merchants to try out different refined varieties. In March 1694 Dutch officials at Bandar Abbas complained that the castor sugar they had received from Batavia remained unsold because of its low quality, and earnestly requested that Batavia send them very white and well-dried sugar. They also reported that, besides the Muslims and the Armenians who were importing sugar from Bengal, the latest arrivals from Surat had imported a reasonable quantity of Manila sugar. The sugar was exceptionally pure, "as white as the first snow" (*uitnemend schoon en zo wit als de eerste gevallene sneeuw*). According to the notice they received, that variety was brought from Manila by ships of the renowned Bohra merchant at Surat named Abd al-Ghafur. His agents had purchased the sugar for 2 and 2.5 *rijksdaarler*s per picol, and once it was brought to Surat it was sold for 3.5 rupees for 36 ¼ Dutch pounds. The Dutch officials concluded that, if these facts were correct, the variety yielded a good profit and was encouraging Abd al-Ghafur and other merchants to carry on the shipping and trade to Manila, which would cause

[39] NA VOC1747 1, letter from Bandar Abbas to The Netherlands, 31 July 1706, pp. 71, 74, 77, 79-80; VOC1747 1, annual sales statement, Bandar Abbas, 1705–06, pp. 372-4.
[40] NA VOC1559, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 20 March 1694, fols. 834v-5r.
[41] NA VOC1667, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 30 April 1702, pp. 437-8, 443-4.
[42] NA VOC1897, instruction from J.J. Ketelaar to Bandar Abbas, 8 March 1717, p. 171.
[43] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 409.

great trouble for the Company's trade. In fact, the Manila variety attracted merchants from the upper countries for its whiteness and purity, and it fetched a price of 3 17/20 *maḥmūdī*s per *man*. The Surat ships that imported Manila sugar into Bandar Abbas that year included an Armenian ship called *St. Thomas*. This ship came from Bengal on 28 January 1694 with freight, mostly weighed goods including large amounts of Manila sugar and various varieties of Bengali sugar, etc. Soon afterwards another ship also brought various kinds of sugar including Manila sugar. According to the VOC, this ship, recorded as an English private vessel from Bengal, had procured the Manila sugar at Madras on its way to Bandar Abbas. At Bandar Abbas the sugar fetched a price of 3 7/10 *maḥmūdī*s per *man*.[44]

Furthermore, English private traders were busy importing well-processed Chinese sugar into Bandar Abbas.[45] There was some difficulty in selling their castor sugar in 1705–06, for the VOC mentioned the enormous import of refined sugar by the Company itself and by the English traders in that year. They were quoting wholesale merchants who said there was far too much to dispose of in the next two years.[46] What presented a great menace to the Dutch was, however, the fact that the Chinese castor sugar (*poedersuiker*) that the English imported that year was outstandingly pure and as white as the first snow.[47]

It should be noted that while the VOC was trying to overtake other suppliers of sugar, another hard competition was going on among the Company's "competitors", also to help decrease the price of sugar in Safavid Iran. On 10 April 1706, an English ship called *The Loyal Cook* came from Bengal to Bandar Abbas with 2,000 sacks (*zakken*) of Bengali sugar. According to the ship's crew they would be followed by many other competitors, including two more English ships, a Danish ship, two Muslim vessels from Bengal, and a few ships from China and Coromandel. This news evoked a surprisingly positive response from the Dutch, because they saw that the increased competition might reduce their rivals' profits. Their ultimate hope was that the traders would have to give up their shipping to Bandar Abbas in the following season, and then the VOC could dominate sugar imports into Iran.[48] There were four non-Dutch ships which followed with sugar cargoes that year. Three of the arrivals were English vessels, two from Bengal and one from China; the other was a Danish ship from Bengal. A Dutch report recorded the arrival of the above-mentioned English vessel as "*de Wettelijke Kok*" laden with only 1,000 sacks of castor sugar, and that that *The Loyal Cook*

[44] NA VOC1559, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 20 March 1694, fols. 833r-4r, 838r.
[45] For China's sugar production, see C. Daniels, *Agro-Industries and Forestry: Sugarcane Technology*, part 3 of *Biology and Biological Technology*, vol. 6 of *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); S. Mazumdar, *Sugar and Society in China: Peasants, Technology, and the World Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998); G. Souza, "Hinterlands, Commodity Chains, and Circuits in Early Modern Asian History," In *Hinterlands and Commodities: Place, Space and the Political Economic Development of Asia over the Long Eighteenth Century*, edited by T. Mizushima, G. Souza and D. Flynn (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 20-32.
[46] NA VOC1732, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 31 January 1706, pp. 306-7.
[47] NA VOC1732, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 15 April 1706, p. 474.
[48] Idem, pp. 476-7.

came from Bengal one month later with unknown cargoes (but perhaps including Bengali sugar).[49]

## Functions

What functions did sugar perform in Safavid Iran? How did they evolve over time? For this inquiry five principal functions of sugar are examined: the ways in which it was used for medicine, nutrition, festivity, gifts, and a resource.

### *Medicine*

In medieval Arabic medicine cane sugar was highly esteemed as containing valued pharmaceutical properties. Following the traditional Galenic theory in Greek medicine, Arabic pharmacology classified sugar as "hot" and "moist" (old sugar as "hot" and "dry") and believed it was effective against colic, eye disease, cough, asthma and urinary dysfunctions, as well as generally conditioning the kidneys and the liver.[50] Presumably the most popular sugar used as medicine in Safavid Iran was sherbet. It created much demand from urban populations for its medical properties to abate sore throats caused by the hot, dry climate.[51]

Sherbet also encouraged social intercourse. As much as being taken as a medicine people similarly offered sherbet as an appropriate gift for elite persons. During his stay in Isfahan Chardin sometimes received generous treats of conserves, sherbets, etc., from the sister of the late king Abbas II (r. 1642–66).[52] At respectable receptions and meals sherbet was customarily served as a refreshment.[53] Raphaël Du Mans, the head of the French Capuchin mission in Safavid Iran, noted that on such occasions sherbet (*chourbet*) was served as a refreshing drink, with pomegranate juice or lemon juice with added sugar and ice.[54] As Housseini suggests, the sherbet house belonging to the king functioned as a "guest house" where foreign ambassadors were offered sherbet while waiting for a royal audience.[55]

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[49] NA VOC1732, shipping list, Bandar Abbas, 19 July 1705–15 April 1706, p. 593; VOC1747 1, shipping list, Bandar Abbas, 13 April 1706–30 November 1706, pp. 375-7; VOC1763, shipping list, Bandar Abbas, 30 November 1706–21 December 1707, p. 342.
[50] T. Sato, *Sugar in the Social Life of Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 91-103.
[51] T. Morikawa, "Persia-kyutei no wine to sherbet [Wine and Sherbet at the Persian court]," In *Shoku to bunka: Jiku wo koeta shokutaku kara [Food and Culture: Eating across Space and Time]*, edited by N. Hosoda (Hokkaido: Hokkaido-daigaku Shuppankai, 2015), 82-3, 92.
[52] Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin*, vol. 3, 190-1, vol. 4, 44.
[53] Idem, vol. 4, 65.
[54] Du Mans, *Estat de la Perse*, 110-1.
[55] A. Hosseini, "Sharba wa sharba-khāna dar gudhar-i zamān [Iran's Sherbet and Sherbet Houses in Passage of Time]," *Bāgh naẓar* 10, no. 25 (2013): 57-66.

### *Nutrition*

During the Safavid period sugar also featured as a valued condiment and sweetener among the great and the wealthy.[56] While the use of this still luxurious "food item" increased, many European visitors from Safavid Iran observed the frugality of their Iranian diet. Chardin commented that Asians in general and Iranians in particular ate much less than Europeans. He said that Iranians only had two meals per day. The first was eaten between 10 a.m. and noon, and consisted of fruit, such as melons and grapes, cheese, milk and conserves. The second, their main meal, was around 7 p.m., and consisted of soups prepared from fruit and herbs, roasted meat, eggs, vegetables, and pilaf (*pilo*).[57] There can be no doubt that fruit provided much of the needed calories. Jean Thévenot, a French traveller who visited Iran in the mid-1660s, related that the Iranians were especially immoderate in the amount of fruit they ate. Fryer quoted French inhabitants of Isfahan who said that more melons, cucumbers and other fruit were consumed there in one month than in Italy, France and Spain in half a year.[58]

As we have seen before, sugar had been a consistent element in this staple fruit-centred diet during the seventeenth century. The wealthy consumed conserves and sherbets in their private life and not just at respectable receptions and entertainments. Sugar was stored in their houses along with conserves and sherbets. They enjoyed confections (*confections*) made with musk, amber and some sorts of conserves (*confitures*) before and after their meal.[59] The increased intake of calories from sugar also went hand in hand with the rise of urban life. The most sumptuous aspect of this, Fryer said, were the public baths (*ḥammām*s). They could be found in all the cities and were open to everyone of both sexes for a small price. When visitors of an elevated status retired from a bath to put on their clothes, they would find a collection of fruits, sweetmeats, and various perfumes, such as rosewater, awaiting them. All the attendants and waiters prepared coffee (*coho*), tea, tobacco, or brandy for them.[60] Though available information is rather limited, we could say that sugar became a "necessity" among the lower strata of the population of Isfahan by 1670. In the early 1670s the confectioners and pastry cooks in the capital requested the grand vizier (*iʿtimād al-dawla*) to introduce a fixed price for sugar. If the government failed to prevent merchants who had bought the sugar products at Bandar Abbas selling it for unreasonable prices at Isfahan, they claimed that food riots could occur because of a prolonged shortage of supplies.[61]

### *Festivity*

As in many other sugar-consuming countries, in Iran sugar was deemed to be a symbol of prosperity and blessing. Dishes prepared with sugar were lavishly consumed at festivals such

[56] Morikawa, "Persia-kyutei no wine to sherbet," 78-95.
[57] Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin*, vol. 4, 26-30, 46-7. For similar observations, Du Mans, *Estat de la Perse*, 110-1; Fryer, *A New Account of East-India*, 405.
[58] Thévenot, *Suite du Voyage de Levant*, vol. 2, 180; Fryer, *A New Account of East-India*, 263.
[59] Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin*, vol. 4, 42, 44.
[60] Fryer, *A New Account of East-India*, 343-4.
[61] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 402-3.

as *Nawrūz*.[62] At the enthronement of Abbas III at Isfahan in September 1732, his regent Tahmasp Quli Khan visualized the restored Safavid power by distributing a "royal sugar banquet" (*koninglijke suikerbanquet*).[63]

It is possible that the consumption of sweetmeats at special family events significantly increased during the Safavid period.[64] According to William Francklin, an EIC man who stayed in Shiraz in 1786–87, a proposal for marriage would involve the father or mother of the man (or sometimes his sister) together with his friends going to the house of the woman to whom the proposal was to be made. If the woman's father accepted the proposal, he would immediately order sweetmeats to be brought out as a direct sign of compliance. A few days after a child was born, the friends and relatives of the mother would assemble at her house to enjoy music and dancing girls. After the amusements a learned Muslim (*mullā*) would be introduced. He would take the baby in his arms and ask the mother what name she chose for the child. After he was told, the *mullā* would begin to pray, reciting the name into the infant's ear three times for the baby to remember, and telling it to be obedient to its parents and to venerate the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad, etc. Having repeated the profession of faith (*shahāda*), the *mullā* would return the child to the mother. Then the company would be entertained with sweetmeats, a part of which the female attendants would take away in their pockets, since they believed that it was an "infallible means" of them having babies themselves.[65]

### *Gift and treat*

The habit of presenting sugar and serving sweetmeats was also widespread in high society during the Safavid period. During his stay in Isfahan from 1618–21, Della Valle saw Abbas I receive loads of tribute from the ruler of Shiraz, Imam Quli Khan, who was then trying to establish Safavid rule in the Iranian littoral of the Persian Gulf. Among this tribute were two lumps of sugar bread that were so large they needed a whole wagon to be transported. However, he thought the gigantic sugar bread reflected the sense of material inferiority the Iranians possibly felt towards the Indians. He said that the king had ordered the governor to make them so big in order to show the Indian ambassador at the time, who was known to boast about his country's sugar, that Iran was also overflowing with it.[66]

Because of the "reciprocal" nature of gift-giving in Iran, the presenting of sugar was a sign of mutual social recognition; it usually provided people with an opportunity to recognize each other's place and grade in the hierarchy of the Safavid dynasty.[67] Fryer stated that, during his travel from Bandar Abbas to Isfahan in 1676, as he approached great cities or populous towns, the governors would send out their deputies to welcome and guide him to his

[62] Kaempfer, *Am Hofe des persischen Grosskönings*, 218-22.
[63] NA VOC2554, description of the rise of Nadir Shah, 31 May 1741, fols. 2265v-6r.
[64] Morikawa, "Persia-kyutei no wine to sherbet," 93-4.
[65] W. Francklin, *Observations made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia, in the years 1786–7* (London: T. Cadell, 1790), 109-10, 120-2.
[66] Della Valle, *Der voortreffelyke reizen*, vol. 3, 177.
[67] R. Matthee, "Gift-giving iv: The Safavid Period," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, updated 9 February 2012.

lodge. They would bring provisions for his party, not only serving dried and fresh sweetmeats, but also sending sheep, barley, rice, etc. On their departure, the party was offered horses, but could not leave until they had paid for all of these items. He said, "So soon their humanity is turned to avarice; for how can that be esteemed a gift, which is bestowed with an intent to gain?"[68] Foreign agents in Safavid Iran, particularly those of the European companies, were complaining about the custom of offering presents including sugar to the king and high-ranking individuals in order to gain their favours and receive benefits from them. Joan Cunaeus, the Dutch envoy to the court of Abbas II, therefore rejoiced when he received from the court seven big dishes of sweetmeats (*gebakken suiker*) which were prepared for the king at the royal banquet that evening, since this was deemed to be a great honour in the country.[69]

As Smidt and Della Valle observed, an Iranian banquet in the early seventeenth century chiefly comprised a serving of fruits, wine, conserves, and pilaf. Further research is required to know when the "sugar banquet," coffee, and tobacco appeared in the ceremonial diet and how they transformed it over time. What we can say with certainty is that the fancy style of eating became quite common among the upper classes of society by the fall of the Safavid dynasty. During his court visit in 1717–18, around five years before the Afghan conquest of Iran, Ketelaar recorded the serving of a sugar banquet, coffee, warm rosewater and tobacco as the usual Iranian treat (*het gewone traktement van suikerbanquet, cauwa en warm rosewater als ook een caljoen*).[70]

### *Resource*

Because of the population's strong appetite for sugar, the elite turned their attention to the economic and financial rewards that sugar offered. In the 1670s, various local officials in ports and provinces, such as the governors of Bandar Abbas, Lar, and Shiraz, and the customs master (*shāhbandar*) of Bandar Abbas, were all involved in the sugar trade.[71] In 1706, Sultan Husayn (r. 1694–1722) honoured a *sayyid* (descendant of Prophet Muhammad) called Mirza Murtada with the title of "the king's merchant" (*koningshandelaar*), and issued an edict ordering his treasurer to give Mirza Murtada 4,000 *tūmān*s so that he could buy sugar and other bulk goods from the Dutch and the English at Bandar Abbas and sell them to other merchants. He was expected to earn a profit, for the edict stipulated that Mirza Murtada had to use two thirds to reimburse the court officials (perhaps shared sponsors) and was entitled to the rest for himself.[72] The news of Mirza Murtada's arrival, however, made all the local merchants hesitant to trade at Bandar Abbas. A leading merchant at Shiraz called Hajji Nabi wrote to the VOC that if he had sent his trading agent to the port, the king's merchant together with the *nāẓir-i buyūtāt* (the *nazier* was the superintendant of the royal workshops) and other

[68] Fryer, *A New Account of East-India*, 239.
[69] C. Speelman, *Journaal der reis van den gezant der O.I. Compagnie Joan Cunaeus naar Perzië in 1651–1652*, edited by A. Hotz (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1908), 152.
[70] NA VOC1901, diary, J.J. Ketelaar, fols. 981v-2r.
[71] Klein, "Trade in the Safavid Port City," 404-5.
[72] NA VOC1747 1, edict from Sultan Husayn to Mirza Sayyid Murtada, 6 October 1706, pp. 378-80. For Mirza Murtada, W. Floor, *The Economy of Safavid Persia*, 58.

court officials would have complained that he was the only one who was obstructing their project.[73]

The remarkable value of sugar as a resource was in part due to the financial stringency with which the Safavid court had struggled since the latter half of the seventeenth century. The change of the commercial relationship between the Safavids and the VOC at the turn of the eighteenth century reflected this. What defined their relationship during the seventeenth century was the contract for silk: the VOC bought a given amount of Iranian raw silk from the court for a contracted price every year, and the court in turn gave the Company various commercial privileges, such as trading goods with no inspection, exemption from customs and tolls, etc. Their agreement was concluded in 1695, the beginning of Sultan Husayn's reign, when it was stipulated that the VOC bought 300 *carga*s of silk at 44 *tūmān*s per *carga*, and the court in turn guaranteed the Company free trade, exemption from customs duties (up to an annual import and export of 20,000 *tūmān*s) and from road tolls (*rāhdārī*s).[74]

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, however, the increased cost of silk made the court unable to deliver the contracted amount, which made them look for an alternative financial device.[75] In July 1699, the court suggested that the silk trade be discontinued, and offered to confirm the Dutch's usual rights on the condition that the VOC had to deliver an annual tribute (*recognitie*) consisting of cash and some rarities and goods.[76] But the VOC declined to accept this change to their treaty. Lengthy negotiations ensued till November 1701, when the court and the Dutch ambassador Jacob Hoogkamer finally reached an agreement. It stated that the king would promise to continue to supply 100 *carga*s of silk at 44 *tūmān*s every year and allow the VOC exemption from import, export and other duties (*in-, uitvoer en andere gerechtigheden*) up to the amount of 20,000 *tūmān*s as before. What was new to the agreement was that the VOC had to submit goods as tribute (*schenkagiegoederen*) to the royal workshops (*konigsgebruikhuizen*) in order to conclude a silk contract (*om een contract op honderd carges zyde te maken*). The Company did not have to send these goods if the king failed to deliver the contracted amount of silk. But the Company was obliged to send the tribute whenever the king delivered silk even if it did not want to accept.[77] There is little doubt that the *konigsgebruikhuizen* referred to the royal sherbet houses, for in 1707 the VOC submitted the treaty goods to the workshops (*serbethuizen*) in return for 40 *carga*s of silk sent from the court.[78] The new treaty specified items to be submitted, consisting mostly of castor

[73] NA VOC1747 1, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 4 April 1707, p. 430; VOC1747 1, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 30 November 1706, pp. 49-51.
[74] W. Floor, "Dutch Relations with the Persian Gulf," In *The Persian Gulf in History*, edited by L.G. Potter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 240-5; F.W. Stapel (ed.), *Corpus diplomaticum*, vol. 4 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1935), 116-9.
[75] R. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver, 1600–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 208-9.
[76] F.W. Stapel (ed.), *Corpus diplomaticum*, vol. 3 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1935), 153-4.
[77] Stapel (ed.), *Corpus diplomaticum*, vol. 4, 209-12.
[78] NA VOC1763, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 21 December 1707, p. 117; Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran*, 245.

sugar (83 per cent) with some candy sugar (9 per cent), amounting to 32.2 tons in total (as below).[79]

10,000 *man-i Tabrīz* (ca. 2.9 kg) castor sugar (*poedersuiker*)
1,120 *man-i Tabrīz* candy sugar (*kandijsuiker*)
144 *man-i Tabrīz* cardamom
144 *man-i Tabrīz* cloves
284 *man-i Tabrīz* cinnamon
284 *man-i Tabrīz* pepper
1,000 *mithqāl* (4.608 g) nutmeg
130 *mithqāl* mace
650 *mithqāl* agarwood
4 *man-i Tabrīz* benzoin
24 *man-i Tabrīz* white sandalwood
2,000 *mithqāl* radix china
8 *man-i Tabrīz* candied (*geconfijte*) nutmeg
4 *man-i Tabrīz* candied cloves

It seems clear that the court's high demand for sugar as an asset correlated with the continuous outflow of gold and silver specie from Iran during the late Safavid period. In the early 1710s, the agreement became virtually invalid when it was disclosed that the VOC was "smuggling" specie out of the country, exploiting their right to free transport.[80] While the king wanted to expel the Dutch from his country, the grand vizier, whom the Dutch called the most capable buyer of their sugar and spices, asked him to be patient, saying "if the Europeans left the country, the prices of sugar and spices would skyrocket."[81] The court instead demanded that the VOC send the specified goods twice a year.[82] The prominent mercantile-cum-political role of the grand vizier is reminiscent of the notion of India's "portfolio capitalists": there was a high degree of commercialization of military and political power in pre-modern India, as many merchants straddled the arenas of commerce and political participation.[83] The diplomatic issue was finally settled in August 1717. Sultan Husayn reconfirmed the previous silk contract, and stipulated that the VOC be exempt from tolls, road tolls and one per cent of the tariff (*een pro cent*) on their annual imports and exports, up to a limit of 20,000 *tūmān*s, with the proviso that they did not smuggle other merchants' goods under the Company's name. However, now it was not payment for silk but sugar that secured the Company their usual rights. The royal edict stated that the VOC's commercial privileges be confirmed only when they submitted the prescribed goods (*voorshrevene schenkagiegoederen voor haar verkregene vrijheden sonder uitstel sullen hebben te leven*).[84]

[79] Stapel (ed.), *Corpus diplomaticum*, vol. 4, 212.
[80] Floor, "Dutch Relations with the Persian Gulf," 246-7.
[81] NA VOC1886, report from W. Backer Jacobsz to Batavia, 24 March 1716, pp. 20-1; VOC1886, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 15 February1716, pp. 69-70.
[82] NA VOC1913, report from J.J. Ketelaar at Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 31 March 1718, pp. 473-5; Floor, "Dutch Relations with the Persian Gulf," 247-8.
[83] S. Subrahmanyam and C. Bayly, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, no. 4 (1988): 401-24.
[84] Stapel (ed.), *Corpus diplomaticum*, vol. 4, 495-500.

In short, it was because of Iran's rich fruit diet that large amounts of cane sugar were imported during the Safavid period. Once associated with conserves and sherbets, sugar became an integral part of the population's diet. There was no gender, ethnic, or moral boundary in sugar consumption in Safavid Iran, only the issue of affordability. Whereas maritime sugar was destined for many different markets in Iran and probably overseas, the Safavid court was by far the largest magnet. Sugar came from various sugar-producing countries in Asia such as Northwest India, China, Taiwan, Bengal, Oman and Java, and varied greatly in character and quality. Relative prices as much as the diversity in people's tastes determined what variety was used for what purpose. Sugar was in great demand in the court circle for nutrition, festivities, gifts and treats, and as a resource. It is noteworthy, though, that sugar consumption in urban life was also commonplace in the Safavid period. Sugar, though still a "luxury", moved closer to becoming a "necessity", even for the lower strata of the urban population, by the turn of the eighteenth century.

## 2. After the Safavid period

### Relocation of market

The fall of the Safavids triggered a prolonged power struggle among regional and local elites in Iran. While many scholars have stressed the imperial and economic decline in this phase, some historians have claimed that alternative channels of commerce, in many places away from the turbulent centre of Isfahan, developed together with the formation of capable political entities. They note that the pivot of the Gulf trade shifted away from Bandar Abbas to the northern ports of Bushire and Basra in the second half of the century, as the Zands in Shiraz and the *mamlūk*s in Baghdad encouraged the trade through their territories. On the other hand, the Durrani rule over Afghanistan facilitated caravan commerce from Gujarat and Sind to Iran, and at the turn of the nineteenth century the Qajars in Teheran further stimulated this overland traffic to northern Iran. In the meantime, the rise of the Utubis in Kuwait and Bahrain and that of the Bu Saids in Masqat increasingly redirected the Indian Ocean shipping with Iran from the Iranian littoral to East Arabia, while developing a new link with the Iranian hinterland through Sind. Accumulated evidence of sugar flows in Iran and the bordering countries seems to substantiate these views.

#### *Isfahan and Teheran*

It seems likely that, after the fall of the Safavids, frequent interruptions of caravan traffic from the Persian Gulf decreased the availability of sugar in Isfahan. Available price lists of commodities sold at the Isfahan market suggest that the price of sugar began to rise from around 1740 (Figure 1.1).

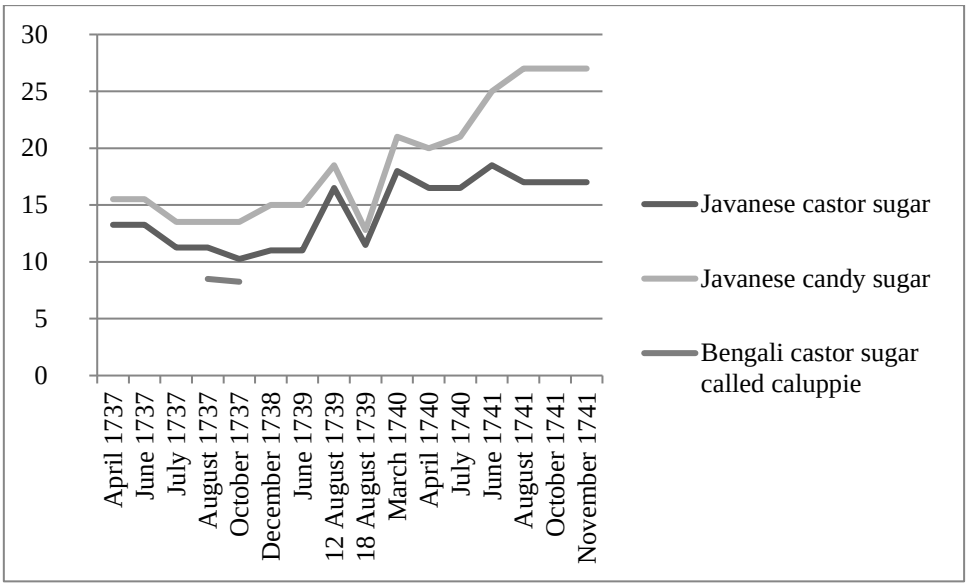


Figure 1.1: Sugar prices at the Isfahan market, 1737–41 (*maḥmūdī*s per *man-i shāhī*)

Sources: Appendix 1 (NA VOC2448 pp. 1576-86, 1589-92; VOC2476 pp. 1396-8; VOC2510 pp. 1472-7; VOC2511 pp. 1429-40; VOC2584 pp. 2444-9, 2453-7).

Perhaps the Isfahan market continued to thrive in the mid-eighteenth century. VOC officials at Bandar Abbas reported in 1750 that, because of the extraordinarily high price of foodstuff in the upper regions (*extra duurte der levensmiddelen in de bovenlanden*), the merchants wanted to spend their money to get sugar and fine textiles.[85] By 1785, however, the market became a mere shadow of its former self. According to Louis-François de Ferriéres-Sauveboeuf, a French traveller who stayed in Isfahan during the years 1784–85, two-thirds of the city was in ruins, and a large number of Iranian inhabitants and also many Armenians, a principal mercantile community of the city, took refuge in Baghdad and Basra.[86]

We know little about Isfahan and its market in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. But sugar consumption in urban life probably came back towards the turn of the century. Guillaume-Antoine Olivier, a French entomologist, visiting Iranian cities such as Kermanshah, Teheran, Isfahan, etc. in 1796, commented that the Iranians loved all kinds of sweets (*sucreries*), conserves (*confitures*) and candies (*bonbons*).[87] Iran not only imported candy sugar (*sucre candi*) from Bengal and Batavia, but also exported fruits preserved in various substances, such as vinegar, grape-jam, honey, as well as sugar to Hindustan.[88]

The establishment of the Qajar power base in Teheran probably attracted more sugar to the new capital. In September 1796, at a caravanserai in Teheran, an Isfahan inhabitant held a

[85] NA VOC2766, letter from Bandar Abbas to Batavia, 10 May 1750, p. 218.
[86] He noted that some neighbouring cities, such as Kashan, Qom and Teheran, were also damaged. L.-F. Comte de Ferriéres-Sauveboeuf, *Mémoires historiques, politiques et géographiques des voyages faits en Turquie, en Perse et en Arabie depuis 1782 jusqu'en 1789*, vol. 2 (Paris, Buisson: 1790), 37, 39, 41, 42, 43, 76.
[87] G.A. Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman, l'Égypte et la Perse*, vol. 5 (Paris: H. Agasse, 1801–07), 19-20.
[88] Idem, 322-3.

feast for six compatriots of his who had just come back with the royal army from Khorasan. After music and drama performances, he served around 20 guests with a supper of cooked rice and meat, sweets (*friandises*), conserves (*confitures*), many fruits and a little wine.[89] Just like in the Safavid court, sugar was an integral part of political and social life at the Qajar court. It was a tremendous honour for a subordinate to receive a gift of sugar from the king.[90] In the Qajar cuisine, sugar featured as a valuable condiment. [91]

### *Kerman, Yazd and Khorasan*

After the Safavid period, whereas the old commercial highway from Bandar Abbas through Lar and Shiraz to Isfahan steadily declined, the trading route from Bandar Abbas to northern cities, such as Kerman and Yazd, was significantly developed. In the late 1720s merchants appeared who bought sugar from the VOC at Bandar Abbas to send to Kerman.[92] Whereas merchants from Lar, Shiraz and Isfahan faded away, Multani merchants became the principal buyers of Dutch sugar at the port by 1760.[93]

It is likely that the northern route at first functioned as an alternative passage to Isfahan. A Dutch caravan sent from Bandar Abbas in 1737 reached Isfahan through Yazd. During its journey, the caravan encountered six merchants who were also on their way to Isfahan: four *Banian*s, one Armenian and one Khorasani Muslim.[94] In the latter half of the eighteenth century, however, Kerman and Yazd were closely linked with the trade of Khorasan and beyond. In 1762, EIC officials at Bandar Abbas noted that Kerman was the place where all goods that were traded at the port for Khorasan, Qandahar, Mashhad, etc. headed first, and that the only alternative passage was via the Sirjan-Yazd route.[95]

In the late 1750s, Bandar Abbas's trade was severely hampered. Consequently, the northbound caravan traffic changed course to Minab, an eastern settlement of Bandar Abbas. The EIC noted that caravans laden with various Indian goods left for Kerman and other places in the interior from this town.[96] There is no doubt that these goods included sugar from Masqat under the Bu Saids (1749– present), since in those days merchants crossed the Gulf from Minab to Masqat to get the item for more competitive prices.[97]

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[89] Idem, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman*, vol. 5, 131-2.
[90] W. Floor, *Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran (1800–1925)* (California: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 330-2.
[91] Sh. Mahdavi, "Qajar Dynasty xiv: Qajar Cuisine," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, updated 19 March 2015.
[92] NA VOC2042, letter from Bandar Abbas to The Netherlands, 16 June 1727, fol. 3945r.
[93] NA VOC2968, letter from the ship *Nieuw Nieuwen Kerk* to Batavia, 1 May 1759, pp. 9-10.
[94] NA VOC2448, diary, Brand, Bandar Abbas to Isfahan, pp. 1545, 1547-8, 1561.
[95] British Library (BL) India Office Records (IOR) G/29/14, 20 July 1762.
[96] BL IOR G/29/13, 9 February 1761.
[97] NA VOC2968, letter from the ship *Nieuw Nieuwen Kerk* to Batavia, 1 May 1759, p. 18.

### *Gujarat and Sind*

During the period following the decline of the Safavids, maritime traders increasingly explored sugar markets in western India, especially Gujarat. From the late 1740s, Surat, a leading trading port of Gujarat, experienced an influx of sugar. The Dutch sales of Javanese castor sugar tripled from 27.1 million pounds during 1702–44 to 81.2 million pounds during 1746–91.[98] The English and the Portuguese also imported large quantities of sugar from Bengal, Batavia, Malacca, and China, while the French brought considerable amounts from Mauritius in the last quarter of the century.[99] Moreover, indigenous cane sugar participated in the competitive market by 1790.[100]

Why did sugar flock to Surat in the latter half of the eighteenth century? R. Barendse argues that sugar supplies to Iran shifted from the sea lanes to an overland route. He said that, in the latter half of the century, caravan commerce from India to Iran via Herat under the Durranis (1747–1973) developed to such a degree that it replaced much of the old maritime trade of the Gulf.[101] On the other hand, G. Nadri suggests that there was a substantial growth of sugar consumption in Gujarat in the eighteenth century. Whereas part of the sugar imported to Surat passed on to Deccan, Kutch, Sind, Multan, and even Tibet, he claims that a large part of it was consumed in Gujarat itself, because "a large cluster of relatively prosperous intermediate and subaltern groups" in the region began to increase their sugar consumption during that period.[102] A paucity of available source materials hinders any definite conclusion, but one may assume that people that received sugar from Surat also promoted sugar consumption in their towns, thus contributing to the enormous sugar inflow. During their trial marketing in Sind in 1757, the VOC described castor sugar as a principal commodity there, "without which, it is impossible for that nation [the population of Sind] to survive" (*zonder dewelk het die natie onmogelijk is te leven*).[103] In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Sind also received supplies of sugar from Masqat. Appreciable amounts were sent up from there through the Indus River to Khorasan.[104]

### *Shiraz*

From the late 1720s Bushire rose to become a major maritime entrance to Shiraz, as increasing insecurity made travel from Bandar Abbas to Shiraz difficult for merchants.[105] In

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[98] G. Nadri, "The Dutch Intra-Asian Trade in Sugar in the Eighteenth Century," *International Journal of Maritime History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 93-5.
[99] Nadri, "The Dutch Intra-Asian Trade," 83; Idem, *Eighteenth-Century Gujarat: The Dynamics of Its Political Economy, 1750–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 114-5.
[100] A. Hove, *Tours for Scientific and Economical Research, made in Guzerat, Kattiawar, and the Conkuns, in 1787–88* (Bombay: Bombay Education Society's Press, 1855), 92, 99, 100.
[101] R. Barendse, *The Western Indian Ocean in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1 of *Arabian Seas 1700–1763* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 301-2.
[102] Nadri, *Eighteenth-Century Gujarat*, 115-6.
[103] NA VOC2937, report, W. Brahé and N. Mahué, 8 May 1757, p. 18.
[104] BL IOR P/414/51: Bombay Commercial Proceedings, report on the commerce of Arabia and Persia, S. Manesty and H. Jones, 15 August 1790, pp. 125-6.
[105] BL IOR G/29/5, 30 January 1729, 5 April 1729.

the early 1750s, when Bushire was mired in local power struggles, neighbouring ports such as Bandar Rig, Bandar Deylam, and Bandar Ganaveh emerged in its place, and they continuously supplied maritime goods for inland cities such as Shiraz and Isfahan.[106]

Under Zand rule (1765–94) the sugar market in Shiraz progressed. Sugar was an indispensable item at special occasions, such as marriage proposals and baby-naming ceremonies. Scattered evidence suggests that a wide range of the population was familiar with using sugar as well as local sweeteners, such as grapes and manna.[107] An EIC merchant, Scott Waring, wrote in 1802 that an antidote against animal poisons called "*dum*" (*dam*, i.e. breath) was well known there. Folk believed that the power to withstand animal toxins occurred in a person as a reward for fasting and meditation, but this immunity might be passed on to someone else the beneficiary saw as deserving a blessing. Many people visited such a gifted man at the time of the wheat harvest, and he extended his favours by breathing onto a piece of sugar (or something else) which they were then ordered to swallow.[108]

### *Caucasus, Gilan and Mazandaran*

During the eighteenth century, notwithstanding increasing tension between the Russians and the Iranians in Iran's northern borders, sugar markets in the Caspian coastlands remained active. Although sugar cane cultivation has a long history in Mazandaran, it was primarily for local use. George Forster, an Englishman travelling from India overland via the Caspian to England in 1783–84, commented that:

> When the general demand of this article in Persia is considered and that it is rarely produced on this side of the Indus, it might be naturally supposed that Mazandaran would derive extensive benefits from such a possession, especially through its navigable vicinity to the southern territories of Russia, where a large quantity is consumed, at an advanced price. Yet from an ignorance in the methods of preparing and refining it, this valuable product yields but a limited utility.[109]

[106] NA VOC2885 1, letter from Kharg to Batavia, 27 September 1755, p. 7.
[107] For the popularity of grape and manna in Shiraz, Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman*, vol. 5, 282-3; E.-T. Hamy, *Voyage d'André Michaux en Syrie et en Perse (1782–85) d'après son journal et sa correspondance* (Geneva: Société Générale d'Imprimerie, 1911), 31.
[108] S. Waring, *A Tour to Sheeraz by the Route of Kazroon and Feerozabad* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1807), 117.
[109] G. Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England: Through the Northern Part of India, Kashmire, Afghanistan, and Persia, and into Russia, by the Caspian-Sea*, vol. 2 (London: R. Faulder, 1798), 216-7. For sugar production areas in Mazandaran, S.G. Gmelin, *Travels through Northern Persia 1770–1774*, translated by W. Floor (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2007), 241.

A German botanist, Samuel Gottlieb Gmelin, stated that, because of its unrefined form, Mazandaran sugar was hard to dissolve in tea, had an unpleasant rancid taste, and looked blackish-yellow.[110]

There seems no doubt that a large quantity of sugar suitable for further processes was brought in from the Persian Gulf during the eighteenth century. As the decline of the Bandar Abbas trade caused a shortfall of sugar supplies for interior markets, maritime sugar was one of the articles most in demand in the Gilan market.[111] In the early 1770s Gmelin noted that Isfahan supplied sugar and cotton manufactured goods for Mazandaran. Considering that Iran had a relatively good connection to the Gulf trade during the Zand period, it is likely that sugar brought in from Isfahan came via Bandar Abbas or Bushire.[112]

But the Caspian regions had begun to import American sugar from Russia, presumably in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and Russia increasingly imported refined sugar from Great Britain towards the end of the century (Figure 1.2).

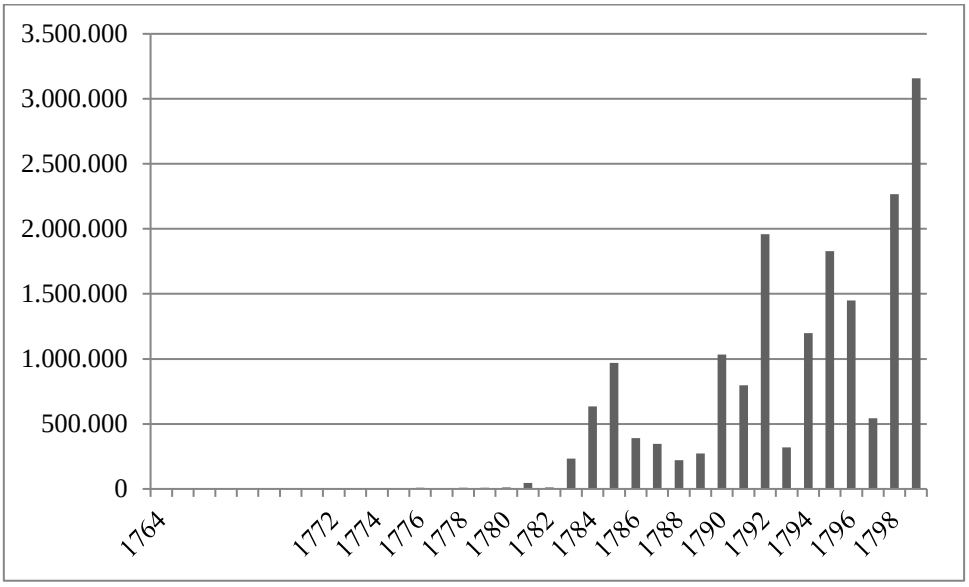


Figure 1.2: British sugar imports to Russia, 1764–99 (British pounds)

Source: A. Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer and the Knout: An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 222-5 (Table 4.63).

Whereas the colonial product became a favoured consumable among the Russian gentry, some of the sugar sent to Russia was destined for northern Iran.[113] Gmelin mentioned that Shamakhi and Rasht imported various goods including sugar from Russia.[114] According to

[110] Gmelin, *Travels through Northern Persia*, 253-4.
[111] BL IOR R/15/1/1, account of the raw silk received from a Coja Sarkees, undated, fols. 67r-9r.
[112] Gmelin, *Travels through Northern Persia*, 245.
[113] Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer and the Knout*, 210.
[114] Gmelin, *Travels through Northern Persia*, 40, 223.

Forster, the sugar sent from Russia was American sugar. He stated that the sugar that he bought at Mashhadsar in Mazandaran was "the produce of West Indies, manufactured in England, and imported at Petersburgh [St. Petersburg], whence it came into Persia by the tract of Astracan [Astrakhan]."[115]

### *Iraq, Arabia, Kurdistan and Anatolia*

As at Bushire, Basra developed as an alternative sugar market to Bandar Abbas from the 1720s onwards. VOC residents at Isfahan reported in 1737 that some *Gorguaanse kooplieden* (either Gorgan or Georgian merchants) came over from Basra and sold castor sugar.[116] The relatively stable *mamlūk* rule (1747–1831) added momentum to the Basra trade. During his stay at Basra in the latter half of 1765, Niebuhr saw many Armenians come over to establish their factories in the city after the turmoil had broken out in Iran. He acknowledged Sulayman Pasha's contribution to the increase in the region's security. Sulayman's reign (1747–62) met with so much approval that, "upon his death, the Arabs made the lamentations, which one still often hears in the coffee houses and on the street in Baghdad. Never have the Arabs been controlled as well as in his reign and that of his father-in-law." The Arab nomads, therefore, stood in much awe, calling him Abu Layla (Father of Night), because he usually made night raids to give them no chance to escape. As a result, Niebuhr noted, the trade from India that used to pass through Bandar Abbas and Isfahan was now carried on through Basra and Baghdad.[117] It seems likely that part of the sugar imported to Basra was meant for regional consumption. Julius Griffiths, an Englishman travelling from Aleppo to Basra in 1786, noted that the Coromandel Coast and Bengal supplied rice, sugar, muslins and a vast quantity of white and blue cloths for common use.[118]

Towards the end of the century, Masqat rose as the major depository of sugar for the West Asian markets. In 1790 the EIC reported that the import of sugar to Masqat was very large and sufficient "for the supply in that indispensably necessary article of the countries of Persia, Arabia Deserta, Mesopotamia, Coordistan [Kurdistan], Armenia, Georgia and Natolia [Anatolia]."[119]

As in the Caspian countries, American sugar was traded in markets in Iraq in the latter half of the eighteenth century. American sugar, refined in Marseilles and reshipped to the Levant, increasingly entered major Ottoman markets, such as Izmir, Istanbul, Aleppo, etc. (Figure 1.3).[120]

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[115] Forster, *A Journey from Bengal*, vol. 2, 213.
[116] NA VOC2448, letter from Isfahan to Bandar Abbas, received on 3 September 1737, pp. 1384-5.
[117] C. Niebuhr, *Reize naar Arabië en andere omliggende landen*, translated by S.J. Baalde and J. van Schoonhoven, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: S.J. Baalde, 1776–80), 292, 301-2.
[118] J. Griffiths, *Travels in Europe, Asia Minor and Arabia* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1805), 389.
[119] BL IOR P/414/51: Bombay Commercial Proceedings, report on the commerce of Arabia and Persia, Manesty and Jones, Basra, 15 August 1790, p. 84.
[120] E. Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 68-70.

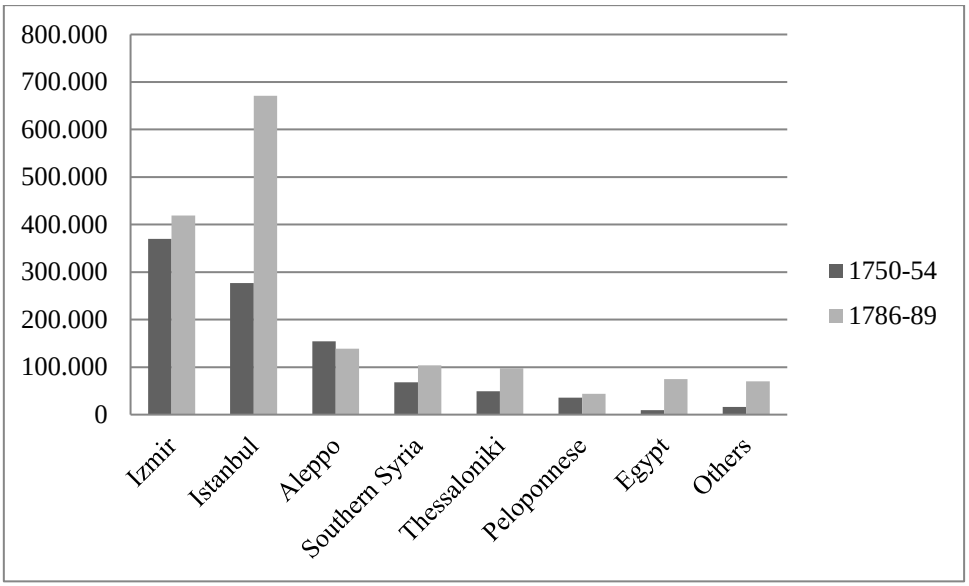


Figure 1.3: French sugar imports to the Levant, 1750–54 and 1786–89 (*livres tournois*)

Source: R. Paris, *De 1600 à 1789. Le Levant*, vol. 5 of *Histoire du commerce de Marseille* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), 558.

Some French sugar sent to Aleppo was probably re-exported further eastwards, though still in limited amounts. An English naval surgeon, Edward Ives, passing through Mosul in 1758, said that European lump and powder sugar was very scarce and expensive there, while candy was more readily available and at rather reasonable prices.[121] Since American sugar was superior to Indian sugar, Olivier commented, it was always preferred unless the price was very dear. Yet much sugar also came from Batavia and Bengal through Basra for consumption in Baghdad and Arabia, and some of this headed for Iran as well.[122]

## Consumption in town

### *War time*

After the Safavids, it seems likely that patterns of sugar consumption remained the same among the populations of cities and towns in Iran and neighbouring countries. During the period following the Afghan conquest of Iran, repeated wars caused a chronic shortfall of food supplies for Iran's urban population. It is tempting to argue that sugar's role as valued nutrition remained crucial in such a situation. The Safavid capital of Isfahan during the Afghan siege is a case in point. Prices of staples remaining in the city skyrocketed due to the siege, and then the population, rich and poor alike, remarkably began to demand sugar. The VOC's Isfahan diary relates:

[121] E. Ives, *A Voyage from England to India, in the year MDCCLIV* (London: printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, 1773), 327.
[122] Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman*, vol. 4, 433, 439.

> At present one sees the poor stamping horses' and camel's bones into pieces and then eating them. Meanwhile sugar which is sold now in the shops instead of bread, because of lack of life's necessities, costs 40 *maḥmūdī*s or Dfl. 17 for powdered sugar and 44 *maḥmūdī*s or Dfl. 18.14 per *man* for lump sugar. This commodity sold well, both to the commoners and to the nobles.[123]

In order to stifle the population's frustration, a supervisor for life's basic needs at Isfahan punished some confectioners by allowing their shops to be plundered by the poor. Through this measure, the Dutch said, "it was hoped that the other sellers of the necessities of life would be so frightened that they also would sell at lower prices. However, the result was rather the reverse of what had been expected, for all the shops were now closed and one sees only some horse and donkey meat hanging here and there in the bazar."[124] The demand for sugar during the Afghan siege was so high that, even after the Safavid regime was restored in the early 1730s, the grand vizier kept accusing the EIC of overcharging for sugar during the siege.[125] The VOC was also accused of the same thing. According to an English Muscovy Company agent James Spilman, "the Dutch, during the siege, before the Afghans took the city, got prodigious riches by the sale of a quantity of sugar for money and jewels, for which Shah Mahomed [the Afghan leader Mahmud] imprisoned and fined them very extraordinarily. Yet they made a considerable figure, tho' they pretended to be poor."[126]

Whether it is true or not, the Iranian diet remained much the same as in the Safavid period. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Olivier was amazed at the population's liking for conserves and sherbets in contrast to their meagre diet.

> People perfectly know how to preserve a great number of fruits well all the year around, but it is conserves (*confitures*), candies (*bonbons*) and cakes (*gâteaux*) in which the Persians excel. Nowhere else have I seen so much of them nor tasted them as pleasant. They preserve a large number of products of the country in sugar (*sucre*). They import much of it from India. They make candies and cakes in all forms and colours with some rice flour and wheat flour, together with eggs, honey, almonds, pistachios, pignolias, sesame, grape-jam (*raisiné*), sugar and particularly manna, […]. They preserve in sugar a great number of flowers and fruits, in which they put all the essences and perfumes of the Orient.

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[123] W. Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia 1721–1729* (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études iraniennes, 1998), 152.
[124] Floor, *The Afghan Occupation*, 158-9.
[125] BL IOR G/29/5, 14 February 1730.
[126] J. Spilman, *A Journey through Russia into Persia by two English gentlemen, who went in the year 1739, from Petersburg* (London: R. Dodsley, 1742), 56.

> The sherbets or beverages which they consumed around the clock are equally varied, equally good, and equally flavoured.[127]

It seems true that the rise in competition among regional and local notables after the Afghan invasion made them keen on acquiring, if not extracting, any disposable resource to keep up their power, sugar being one of them. The VOC archives originating from Iran after the Safavid period, particularly during Nadir Shah's rule (1730–47), contain numerous accounts of goods which the Company submitted to the king and state officials. Many of these presents included large amounts of castor and candy sugar.[128] Hanway, travelling in the Caspian regions in the early 1740s, said that this practice was vital for the great to sustain their relationship with their own subordinates. When he realized that the sweetmeats he served to his guests were mostly taken away by their servants, he said:

> Is it not absurd, in fine, that a strange corruption of manners should induce almost every master to contract with his servant that the greatest part of his wages shall be paid him by his neighbours, though his own expenses are by this means not only increased, but also rendered impatient and vexatious, whilst servants, on the other hand, become extravagant, in consequence of these preposterous revenues, and their morals spoiled by the folly of their masters?[129]

Giving a sugar treat likewise maintained its prominent role as a means of recognizing one another's status among the ruling elite. During his stay in Shiraz in the late 1780s, Francklin wrote:

> A practice of the hospitality is with them [Iranians] so grand a point that a man thinks himself highly honoured if you will enter his house and partake of what the family affords, whereas going out of a house without smoking a *caleàn* (*qalyān*), or taking any refreshment, is deemed affront; that they say that every meal a stranger partakes with them brings a blessing upon the house. To account for this, we must understand it as a pledge of faith and protection, when consider that the continual wars, in which this country has been involved, with very little cessation, since the extinction of the Sefi family [the Safavids], has greatly tended to a universal depravity of disposition, and a perpetual inclination to acts of hostility. This has lessened that softness and urbanity of manners for which this nation has been at all former times so famous, and has at the

[127] Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman*, vol. 5, 288-9.
[128] For instance, NA VOC2448, list of presents submitted to Nadir Shah, etc. at Isfahan, 27 June 1737, p. 1683.
[129] Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade*, vol.1, 144-5.

> same time too much extinguished all sentiments of honour and humanity amongst those of higher rank.[130]

Under these circumstances, it became almost impossible for affluent people in cities to cope with the increasing demand for sugar from the authorities. Some time after his arrival at Bushire in 1737, the Dutch agent Jacob van Schoonderwoerd was informed that a chief merchant and *shāhbandar* of Bushire called Shaykh Madhkur gave presents including two horses, a large quantity of candy and castor sugar, etc., to the *sardār* (commander in chief) of Nadir Shah's troops Mirza Mahdi, who was then in charge of subduing the Gulf Arabs.[131] The Dutch were therefore obliged to promise to prepare such presents as soon as possible, despite the fact that only around one month earlier they had sent him spices, sugar and chintz via the *shāhbandar*.[132] At the feast of *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr*, the *shāhbandar* visited the Dutch lodge with a great retinue. Schoonderwoerd had to treat all of them to coffee, rosewater, and sugar according to the local custom.[133]

### *Persistence of urban life*

Despite the political uncertainty during the eighteenth century, it is quite likely that urban life carried on more or less as normal in many of the towns during that period. A scarcity of contemporary accounts about Kerman, Yazd and Khorasan makes it difficult to know precise details of their respective sugar markets. It seems, however, that the rise of Kerman and Yazd as great commercial nodes after the Safavid period might have increased the use of sugar as gifts to authorities there, as well as at caravan stations located along the trading routes to these cities.[134] In Sind it was commonplace among town rulers to treat guests to various items, such as sweetmeats and rosewater.[135] Social life in Zand Shiraz was also vibrant. The inhabitants were accustomed to consume sugar on special family occasions as well as in communal meeting places, such as bathhouses.[136]

As in the Safavid period, the practice of giving a sugar treat had an important place in the urban life of the Caspian coastland. Peter Henry Bruce, an English military man who joined the Russian campaign to the western and southern coasts of the Caspian Sea in 1722, happened to meet one of the principal inhabitants on a street of Tarki (Tirku) in Daghistan. Despite the fact that there was no appointment between them, the man welcomed Bruce and

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[130] Francklin, *Observations*, 156-7.
[131] Shaykh Madhkur was the founder of the Arab shaykhdom of the Madhkur family at Bushire that lasted until the mid-nineteenth century.
[132] NA VOC2448, diary, J. van Schoonderwoerd, Bushire, pp. 1531, 1538-9.
[133] Idem, p. 2527. In his recent essay, Assef Ashraf also discusses crucial roles that the custom of gift-giving played in the state-formation of the Qajars from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. Assef Ashraf, "The Politics and Gift Exchange in Early Qajar Iran, 1785–1834," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 2 (2016): 550-76.
[134] NA VOC2448, diary, Brand, Bandar Abbas to Isfahan, pp. 1557, 1559-60, 1564, 1566.
[135] NA VOC2937, report, Brahé and Mahué, 8 May 1757, pp. 10-1, 25-6.
[136] Francklin, *Observations*, 70-6, 109-10, 120-2.

his suite to his residence, where he entertained them with coffee, fruits and sweetmeats.[137] Another English military man, Elton John, also experienced this customary treat. When he dropped by a town called "Languaon", east of Rasht (possibly Langharud) in 1739, the vizier of the place treated him to coffee, tea and sweetmeats.[138] The population liked to consume sweetmeats when drinking. At his visit to the admiral of the Persian navy, Muhammad Khan at Babol (Balfrufh), Hanway was entertained with a supper as well as dance and music. After dinner, the admiral invited him to drink brandy. When he declined, Muhammad Khan expressed with much amusement as he referred to Hanway, "I, being an European and Christian, did not delight in spirituous liquors." It was common, Hanway commented, "for each person to set a plate of sweet-meats before him, and drink their liquor in tea-cups till they are drunk, which is generally affected in a very short time."[139] In fact, the Iranians living there were known to have an exceptionally sweet tooth. On their plates there were all kinds of sugar-coated fruits and various jams, which "they indulge in a very wasteful manner, because they uncommonly love sweetmeats."[140]

Periodic conflicts and epidemics notwithstanding, inhabited areas dotted along major trading routes in Iraq appeared to have a brisk social life during the eighteenth century. There is no doubt that Baghdad had an important place in this development. In 1774, an English merchant, Abraham Parsons, witnessed vivid scars of the plague that had hit Baghdad a few years before. He wrote that the disease had reduced the population from around 500,000 to less than 100,000. On the other hand, he saw a strong recovery process going on. He calculated that, since the ravage of the plague had abated, 200,000 inhabitants had come back.[141] Consequently, urban life returned. What excited much curiosity from Parsons was the popularity of coffee houses among the population. According to his inquiry, there were 955 coffee houses on the Persian side, of which more than half had been leased within the last six months. It was usual to see from two to three hundred people at a time at these stores, some playing chess and others smoking, drinking coffee, etc.[142] In the coffee houses people also enjoyed sherbet.[143]

Around the same time, Hilla was known as "Little Baghdad", because the town and its buildings looked so much like those in Baghdad. Straddling the Tigris in the same way as Baghdad, the town also had many licensed coffee houses. Parsons estimated the population to be upwards of 30,000.[144] In spite of Nadir Shah's siege in 1743, Mosul remained active.

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[137] P.H. Bruce, *Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, Esq. A military officer, in the services of Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain* (Dublin: J. and R. Byrn, 1783), 322-3.
[138] Spilman, *A Journey through Russia*, 16-8.
[139] Hanway, *An Historical Account of the British Trade*, vol.1, 250-2.
[140] Gmelin, *Travels through Northern Persia*, 90. However, sugar was not affordable to lower classes, who instead used coagulated grape juice called *shīra*. Forster, *A Journey from Bengal*, vol. 2, 184.
[141] A. Parsons, *Travels in Asia and Africa including a Journey from Scanderoon to Aleppo, and over the Desert to Bagdad and Bussora, a Voyage from Bussora to Bombay, and along the Western Coast of India, a Voyage from Bombay to Mocha and Suez in the Red Sea, and a Journey from Suez to Cairo and Rosetta, in Egypt* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), 128-31.
[142] Idem, 131.
[143] Idem, 133. Iman al-Attar provides a valuable insight into the urban life of Baghdad in the eighteenth century. Imam al-Attar, "Textual Representations of the Socio-Urban History of Baghdad: Critical Approaches to the Historiography of Baghdad in the 18th and 19th Centuries," (PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2014).
[144] Parsons, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, 140.

Carsten Niebuhr, a German traveller who passed from Basra to Aleppo via Baghdad in 1766, wrote that Mosul seemed to have been developed recently. He estimated it to have a population of 20,000 – 24,000 and described the city as reasonably handsome. All public coffee houses, baths and bazars belonged to the ruling family of Abd al-Jalili.[145]

The steady development of urban life in Iraq during the eighteenth century can be attributed to gradual migrations of people from Iran to the major Iraqi cities. As already mentioned, many Armenians moved to Basra from Iran after the Safavid period. Samuel Eversfield, an EIC agent who visited Baghdad in 1779, wrote that the city was large and populous, enjoying the considerable advantage of the Tigris for commerce. There were nearly 80,000 houses in the city, and the inhabitants consisted mainly of Iranians, Armenians, Turks and Jews.[146] On his way back from Isfahan in 1785, Ferriéres-Sauveboeuf was also impressed by the grandeur of the city. He attributed it to three reasons: immigration from Iran, urbanization resulting from the inflow of Arabs who were "fed up with life in tents", and the city's location which was suited for commerce. On the first point, he said that "a great number of Iranians had come over with their families, while the Armenians, refugees from Julfa [at Isfahan], had brought their resources and industry."[147] About ten years later, Mosul was very prosperous. Olivier noted that the population of the province of Mosul was 200,000, and that, since the city was one of the great markets in the Orient, merchants who sought shelter ran into this growing *entrepôt* and did their commerce freely.[148] In Olivier's view, Baghdad was more of an Iranian city than a Turkish one, because there were a large number of bazars devoted to merchants and workers in the city. As for the population, he related that, since Sulayman (Abu Layla or the Great, r. 1780–1802) became governor of Baghdad, the population had increased by 30,000 – 40,000, of whom 12,000 – 15,000 were Iranians, who had escaped from the troubles and the civil wars to which their homeland had been subjected for more than half a century. Jews and Armenians had also settled in the city to expand their commercial enterprises from Turkey and India.[149]

As in Iran, the use of sugar as a treat was a priority in Iraqi high society. Ives experienced it at the provincial court of Diwaniya, a town on the highway between Basra and Baghdad. After his arrival from Basra on 10 May 1758, he and English companions had an audience with the governor of Diwaniya called Ali Agha. Ali Agha was "a native of Persia" and "the most important of any in this part of the world, the Basha of Baghdad excepted." In those days, he commanded a vast region from Qurna, where the power of the governor of Basra ended, up the river as far as Hilla.[150] During the reception, an Armenian merchant from Basra who was staying in Diwaniya at that time called Khwaja Paghos (Cojee Pagoose) and a man called Hermet (Hemet) both served the English party as interpreters.[151] According to Ives,

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[145] Niebuhr, *Reize naar Arabië*, vol. 2, 340, 345.
[146] S. Eversfield, *A Journal, kept on a Journey from Bassora to Bagdad over the Little Desert, to Aleppo, Cyprus, Rhodes, Zante, Corfu, and Otranto, in Italy, in the Year 1779* (Horsham: Arthur Lee, 1784), 44, 48, 51.
[147] Ferriéres-Sauveboeuf, *Mémoires historiques*, vol. 2, 82-3.
[148] Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Othoman*, vol. 4, 269, 272-3, 277-8.
[149] Idem, 313, 324-5. The migration theory might also be applicable to Khorasan and the Caspian. R. Barendse, *Kings, Gangsters and Companies*, vol. 2 of *Arabian Seas 1700–1763* (Leiden: Brill, 2009),790-1, 806-7.
[150] Ives, *A Voyage from England*, 259, 260, 262.
[151] Idem, 259.

Hermet was of French origin. He had served the EIC as an interpreter at Isfahan for many years, but because of the destructive civil war he had left Iran. He joined Ives at Basra and was now on his way to Baghdad "where his family resided, and he proposed carrying them from thence to Venice, his wife's native [place]."[152] Ali Agha talked to the English party through Khwaja Paghos and Hermet; Paghos spoke to Hermet in Persian and Hermet to the party in French and sometimes in "broken" English. Meanwhile the party was served first with a saucer of sweetmeats. Some members tasted four or five very small spoonfuls and obviously intended to finish the whole saucer full. Hermet stopped them, however, because just one spoonful would have been more polite, by whispering, "for dat one spoonful only, was de more polite." Then a small cup of coffee was brought, and after a short interval, a small basin of warm sweet water scented with roses. Lastly, their handkerchiefs were wetted with rosewater, and their noses were refreshed with the smoke of ambergris and agarwood.[153] In November 1774, after five days of travelling from Hilla, Parsons arrived at "a very large Arab town on the Chaldean side" of the Euphrates called "Arjar". The town was governed by "an *emir* (an Arabian prince)" and consisted of tents. After submitting some presents, Parsons invited the Arab governor to his cabin to drink coffee and smoke a pipe. When the governor came to the ship, sweetmeats were served. Parsons wrote that, on this occasion, the governor not only ate the sweetmeats but also filled his pocket with them, and his followers, more than ten in total, followed their master's example.[154]

It may be worth mentioning that it was a sign of respect to serve sherbet and conserves. On 20 July 1730, when Dames Heij and Carel Koenad, the VOC residents at Basra, visited the governor, they were treated to coffee and sherbet (*serbet*) "according to the local custom" (*volgens inlands gebruik*).[155] Upon his arrival in Mosul in June 1743, Jean Otter, a French envoy to Nadir Shah's court, had an audience with the governor of the city called Husayn Pasha (Huseïn Pacha) at his residence (*seraï*). After exchanging the usual Turkish compliments, Otter and the governor conversed with each other in Persian and Arabic. Meanwhile, the governor entertained him with conserves (*confitures*) together with coffee. The audience lasted one hour before sherbet (*cherbet*) and perfume were brought in, and then Otter took his leave. About one week after he left Mosul Otter had another reception with a Kurd chief (*buluk bashi* [*bulūk bāshī*]) called Abd al-Rahman Agha. The chief invited Otter to his tent and his companions to other tents, and civilly treated them to dinner. In return for this warm reception Otter sent him several pounds of tobacco and Mocha coffee, a box of sherbet, and dozens of cups of coffee beans.[156]

A question that has yet to be answered is how these people developed their purchasing power. Recently R. Kazemi and G. Sood have suggested that there was significant

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[152] It is difficult to identify this Frenchman, because many members of the Hermet family worked for the EIC as interpreters at Isfahan from the 1730s onwards. However, the man might be Jacques Charles Hermet, whom we know was on duty as such at least in 1750. Ives, *A Voyage from England*, 237; BL IOR G/29/7, 1 November 1750.
[153] Ives, *A Voyage from England*, 260-2.
[154] Parsons, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, 146.
[155] NA VOC9091, diary, Basra, p. 460.
[156] J. Otter, *Voyage en Turquie et en Perse avec une relation des expéditions de Tahmas Kouli-khan*, vol. 2 (Paris: Freres Guerin, 1748), 251-2, 263-4.

commercialization in Iran and Iraq during the eighteenth century. Although supporting evidence is limited, they argue that people in these countries, especially those outside any governmental purview, increased business activities in the course of the century.[157] Another consideration I would point out is the fact that after the Safavid period, copper became an important alternative export item for gold and silver. Whereas gold and silver came from Europe, copper was produced in Anatolia, Kerman and Khorasan. It is likely that such relatively easy access relieved the population of some of their chronic financial hardship. I shall return to this subject in Chapters 3 and 4.

## Conclusion

The consumer market for sugar witnessed a significant structural reformation after the Afghan conquest of Isfahan in 1722. After the demise of the Safavid court, until then the main market for sugar, many other markets were developed in Iran and neighbouring countries. While the former grand market of Isfahan went into decline, Teheran, Kerman, Yazd, Khorasan, Sind, Shiraz, the Caspian regions, Iraq, Arabia, Kurdistan, and Anatolia attracted much sugar. Accordingly, sugar supplies followed different channels. Whereas the Bandar Abbas-Lar-Shiraz-Isfahan axis declined, the Bandar Abbas-Yazd-Kerman route, the Bushire-Shiraz route, and the Basra-Baghdad route became principal supply lines from the Persian Gulf. In the second half of the century Masqat also developed as the major depository of sugar for the West Asian markets, attracting much of the trans-oceanic shipping of sugar to the Gulf. It is important to note that these changes to a large extent coincided with the rise of efficient regional governments, namely the Qajars in Teheran, the Durranis in Afghanistan, the Zands in Shiraz, the *mamlūk*s in Baghdad, and the Bu Saids in Masqat.

A lively consumption of sugar continued in regional courts and towns during this phase. In Iranian cities and towns, in spite of the chronic shortage of foodstuff, a popular demand for sugar as nutrition would have persisted, while the regional and local elites in their power struggles demanded much sugar as a resource from wealthy people. However, what is more remarkable is the demand persisting in urban life. Sugar featured as an indispensable social item in urban arenas in West Asia, particularly in the Caspian and Iraq. The development of the Iraqi sugar market in the eighteenth century may well owe much to a gradual immigration from Iran to Iraq after the Safavid period. Through this process, it is possible that Iraq progressively shared a social setting with Iran, where sugar enjoyed an eminent status in the popular customary diet.

Thus, the remarkable flexibility and endurance apparent in the consumer market in sugar in West Asia during the eighteenth century underlies the resilient nature of the circulation of

[157] R. Kazemi, "Tobacco, Eurasian Trade, and the Early Modern Iranian Economy," *Iranian Studies* 49, no. 4 (2016): 613-33; G. Sood, *India and the Islamic Heartlands: An Eighteenth-century World of Circulation and Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Concerning eighteenth-century India, Barendse also suggests a shift in the pattern of demand from courts to what he calls "the middling sort" of the population, saying that these people began to boost consumption in urban arenas. Barendse, *Kings, Gangsters and Companies*, 838-46.

sugar in the Persian Gulf during that period. Outlets for maritime sugar in the Gulf corresponded to shifting commercial magnets in the interior. This gives rise to many questions. Who were those involved in the flexible supplies of sugar in the Gulf? What enabled them to adjust rapidly to changing trading conditions there? In order to answer these questions, in subsequent chapters we shall investigate data from the suppliers of sugar to the Gulf during the eighteenth century.