In order to govern the government and the army successfully, Nadir Shah tried to avoid conflicts on religious grounds. For this purpose, he weakened the role of the Shiite clergy in the society, united the Shiism with the Sunnism, and, seeking for recognition of the Jafarid madhhab as the fifth Sunni school by Ottoman Turkey, pursued a tolerant policy towards representatives of various religious denominations.

Having established their political power, the Safavids proclaimed the Imami Shiism (Isna ‘Ashari) the state religion of the country, which became the central component of their identity and ideology. The introduction and rapid spread of the Shiite Imamite dogma and traditions ensured the overwhelming predominance of the Shiite population of the multinational Safavid Empire.

During the reign of the Safavids (1501-1722), representatives of religious minorities experienced both periods of forced conversion to Shiism and periods of tolerance. After the adoption of the Shiism by the major part of the Sunni population, the followers of the conversion turned their attention to the religious minorities inhabiting in Iran.

The words of the American historian M.Amanat, describing the position of the Jewish community in the Safavid period, can also be attributed to representatives of other religious denominations: ‘during the reign of the Safavids, the position of the Jews depended on the attitude of the ruling Shah, who became more orthodox in the last phase of the Safavid era.’ (3, p.39)

The change in attitudes towards members of religious minorities is observed during the ruling of I Shah Abbas (1587-1629), whose policy was aimed at weakening the role of the clergy in the society, and, in particular, Shiism as a force uniting the national consciousness of people (26, p. 26). At that time, Jews and Christians enjoyed the Shah’s exceptional favor. Shah Abbas, trying to expand trade with various countries, by all means supported merchants having relationships in Europe: Jews - silk sellers, Georgian and Armenian merchants. Favorable conditions were created for the representatives of these communities during his reign: everyone knew that they lived and worked in Iran under the protection of the Shah. Shah Abbas used to attend their churches, take part in their religious festivals and interfaith religious debates (14, p. 116). There is also a case when, in order to attract the attention of Christian religious figures and ambassadors of European countries, Shah Abbas in the middle of Ramadan month of 1017/1608, which coincided with Christmas, went to the Catholic Church
of Isfahan, where he drank wine right in front of the Shiite spiritual figures accompanying him (24, p. 947). In addition, as a gesture of friendship, Shah Abbas, along with a large group of Jewish religious leaders, made a foot pilgrimage to a Jewish tomb. But at the same time, there are many reports of persecution of Jews and violent conversion of them into Shiism during the reign of 1st Shah Abbas (14, p. 116).

A sharp deterioration in the position of religious minorities was observed during the rule of Shah Sultan Hussein (1694-1722), characterized by a repeated increase in the authority and power of the Shiite clergy in the society (20, p. 214). The turn of the religious policy course towards Orthodox Shiism was already demonstrated at the coronation of Shah Sultan Hussein: the honor of attaching the sword to the belt of the new Shah: the honor of attaching the sword to the belt of the new Shah at the ceremony of initiation into the shahs was awarded not to a Sufi, as was customary according to the Safavid tradition, indicating the Sufi origin of the Safavid dynasty, but Head of Mullahs Mohammed Bagir Majlisi. The period of the ruling of Shah Sultan Hussein can be called the apogee of cruel treatment of members of religious minorities, not only in the period of Majlisi, but also after his death (when the grandson of the latter Mir Mir Mohammed Hussein occupied the post of Head of Mullahs). The increasing role and prestige of the Shiite clergy at this time is evidenced by a decree issued by Shah Sultan Hussein that all Viziers, governors and other secular officials throughout the empire must obey Majlisi as Sheikh-ul Islam (13, p. 91-92). The result of the irreconcilable position of Majlisi to the Sunnis and Sufis was a huge number of people forcibly transferred to the Shiism, whose number reached 70 thousand (26, p. 81-82).

These changes led to the restoration of the atmosphere of intolerance and repression against religious minorities, which immediately had a negative impact on the situation in the border provinces where Sunnis constituted the majority in large territories such as Balochistan, Herat, Kandahar and Shirvan (26, p. 127-28, 146).

Persons practicing Zoroastrianism were also suffering from the cruel pressure during the ruling of Shah Sultan Hussein. Shortly after the ascension to the throne under the pressure of the Head of Mullahs, the Shah issued a decree on the mandatory transition of Zoroastrians to the Shiism. In 1699, Patriarch Angure witnessed how, in Isfahan, in the Hassanabad Square, where Zoroastrians lived, a mosque was built on the site of a destroyed temple of fire worshipers (26, p. 84). However, later, perhaps as a result of the weakening of the central power, the fire worshipers managed to obtain a permit to build the Atashgah temple in Absheron in Surakhani town, most of which was built in 1713-1720, where believers had the opportunity to perform their religious practices (1 p. 201).

The position of the Jews at this time was not much better than the position of the fire worshipers. According to a decree issued at that time, Jews and Christians were given the right to demand the property of their relatives in return for adopting Islam (26, p. 86). One of the communities that was persecuted during the rule of Shah Sultan Hussein was Indian merchants from Gujarat - banyans, who played an important role in the development of trade relations between Iran and India. According to representatives of the Dutch East India Company, many trading companies and private individuals hired Indians as brokers to represent their commercial interests. Their services were used not only by English and Dutch East India Companies, but also by members of other trading communities. Moreover, the same banyan could be a broker for both East India Companies (7, p. 229). But despite this, since the banyans from India secretly brought their gods, M. Majlisi considered their stay in Iran threatening the rule of the Shiism (18, p. 183), which potentially could adversely affect the trade in general.

However, all the above measures taken to protect and revive the Shiism in a weakened state did not strengthen the national solidarity and unity, but, on the contrary, acted as a factor that led to disunity, destruction and endless conflicts on religious grounds. Moreover, the fre-
quent persecution of Jews who traded with European countries ‘led to the vulnerability of local business circles, which undoubtedly prevented the accumulation of capital in the Iranian economy, by directing its flow outside the country’ (3, p. 44).

The uprising of Afghans who practiced Sunnism ended with an attack on Iran in 1722, led by Mahmud-Gilzai (1722-1725) and the fall of the Safavid dynasty. Ascended to the throne of Iran in 1725, Ashraf-Ghilzai (1725-1730), with the aim of suppressing and restricting the predominance of the country's Shia population, began to raise and promote Sunnis and non-Shiite population of Iran.

According to a decree, issued by him, in the hierarchical ladder of the country's society, the Shiite majority was given the very last, seventh place: they were rated below not only Sunnis, but also banyans (Gujarat Indians), Zoroastrians and Jews. Moreover, as emphasized in the document, the Shiites were to be considered ‘slaves of six other groups’ (9, p. 196-98).

But the intentions of the Afghan conquerors to reassign the social statuses of the country's population on a religious basis could not be realized: in 1726, they were completely defeated by Nadir and expelled from the country. And the latter, having come to power in 1736, also made an attempt to revise and change the structure of the foundation of the state and society in order to change the predominant Shiite character of the state and its institutions (2, p. 706-7).

The religious policy implemented by Nadir Shah was very different from the regime and principles of his Safavid predecessors. In particular, Nadir put a lot of effort into repressing and suppressing Shiite practices associated with the Safavid’s Shiite state (4, p. 169). Nadir Shah proposed a new sect of Islam, which had to become common with the Sunni neighbors in Afghanistan, Turkestan and the Ottoman Empire (19, p. 43). Hoping to achieve the restoration of friendly relations with the Sunni Ottoman Empire and prepare the ground for becoming the head of the united Muslim world, Nadir, by uniting the Shiism and Sunnism, sought for recognition by the Turks of the Jafarid madhhab as the fifth Sunni school (23, p. 56).

To control the vast territories of his empire, which grew as a result of wars of conquest, the policy of Nadir Shah in relation to various religious groups, in particular Christians and Jews, was extremely tolerant (6, p. 30-31; 11, p. 278-81). The policy of Nadir Shah aimed at ensuring that among the peoples residing in the country there were as little as possible hostile, disgruntled people against whom he would have to use the army and perform fights (21, p. 119), and we should not forget that Nadir’s army also consisted of people belonging to various religious denominations.

Nadir Shah’s tolerance towards representatives of religious communities that inhabited the empire is testified to by a multitude of facts, which undoubtedly is a clear indicator of his political foresight. In particular among the Jews, his rule is even now considered liberation from persecution, although the latter, like the entire population of the country, also suffered from heavy tax oppression and extortion, especially in the last years of Nadir's rule (10, p. 360-63; 4, p. 169). It is known that when Sheikh-ul Islam Mirza Abul Gasim informed Nadir Shah about the heavy living conditions of the Jewish community in Kashan and the closing of the synagogues, the latter immediately issued a decree about the opening of 13 synagogues that had not worked for 7 months. Although there is no information about the number of Jews living at that time, based on the available facts, it can be assumed that the Jewish communities in Hamadan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad and Gazvin were quite numerous. In the History of Jews of Iran it is noted that during the reign of Nadir Shah, the status of Jews in Kashan improved to such an extent that Kashan turned into small Jerusalem, and at the beginning of the 18th century became the center of learning of Judaism, where Jewish worshipers were trained for all of Iran. This revival process continued in Kashan for 60 years, which led to such an upswing that the Kashan Jews who were engaging in trade could lay the foundation for capi-
tal, which works and multiplies even now in various countries of Europe, America and Asia. As H. Levi believes, ‘all this was achieved thanks to the conditions that were created for the spiritual development of the Jews in Kashan during the reign of Nadir Shah” (28, p. 469-70).

In addition, as an indicator of the latter’s good relations with the Jewish community, it is possible to cite reports that during financial difficulties Nadir often resorted to the help of the Jews of Mashhad and Gazvin (21, p. 120).

Nadir Shah, who was interested in the development of trade relations of his empire with other countries, patronized banyans, merchants from Gujarat. According to representatives of the Dutch East India Company, the number of their community in Isfahan during the reign of the 2nd Shah Tahmasib numbered 800 people, but in 1734, during the reign of Nadir, it fell to 300 people, which caused the latter’s great concern. Having learned that the ruler of the city demands a tax of 250 Tumans from the Hindus, Nadir immediately issued a decree restricting the tax for banyans - no more than 50 Mahmudi per person per year, and in addition, exempted them from all extraordinary taxes (7, p. 40).

It is known that the Zoroastrians, subjected to pressure during the rule of Sultan Husein, during the attack of the Afghans on Iran provided all possible assistance to the invaders. In particular, during the siege of Yazd, the fire worshipers were preparing to open the city gates to the Afghans, but were exposed in time and could not carry out their plan (17, p. 59), and when the Afghan troops invaded Kerman they met with the invaders as their liberators (25, p. 84) . Therefore, the attitude of Nadir to the Zoroastrians, whom he considered to be unreliable, was negative: the fact that we find in the reports of representatives of the Dutch East India Company in Kerman, eloquently testifies to this. In 1736, Nadir Shah, who was on his way to Kandahar, made a stop in Kerman, where fire worshipers could not pay the required amount. And then Nadir, whom it is difficult to reproach with the fact that he was a supporter of conversion to Islam, put a condition before the fire-worshipers: in case of non-payment, everyone should adopt Islam. And the Zoroastrians trying to keep their faith were forced to sell everything they owned, even their wives and children, in order to pay the tax (7, p. 188).

Unlike his Safavid predecessors, Nadir Shah in relation to representatives of various religious faiths developed the idea of universal unity of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, by finding common features and differences in them. According to the author of Bayan-i Vage, Nadir was interested in that topic during a campaign in Turkestan at a meeting of Muslim scholars, where he witnessed discussions about Islam, Judaism and Christianity (25, p. 111). In Malcolm’s work, there is also information that shortly after the conquest of India in 1740, Koran’s Al-Fath Sura attracted Nadir’s attention, indications of which are found in the Torah and the Bible (12, p. 104). Nadir Shah invited scholars and figures of different religions to him, instructing them to translate Jewish books of Pentateuch (Torah) and the Psalms (Zabut), the Christian Gospel (Bible) and the Holy Koran into Persian (12, p 104; 5, p. 637 8; 11, pp. 280-1; 21, p. 122-23; 15, p. 76-77). The group of scientists was led by court historian Mirza Mehdi khan Astrabadi. They included two famous religious scholars from the famous Khatunabadi family - Mir Mohammed Masum Husseini Khatunabadi (1076-1155) and Mir Abdulgani Khatunabadi (1100-1164), as well as four Jewish, eight Christian and four Muslim scientists (30). Work on the translation continued from May 1740 to June 1741 in Isfahan (6, p.31; 29). As a result, translations of all four Gospels were made: from Matthew, Mark, Luke and Yohan, lists of which are currently kept in Kitabhan-i Kakh-i Gulistan (Iran), the Paris National Library and the Vatican Library (29). The list of the translation of the Koran, carried out upon the order of Nadir Shah, unfortunately, has not reached our days (21, p. 123).

According to Abdulkarim Kashmiri, translations of the Holy Books were presented to Nadir Shah after returning from Turkestan. However, at that time he was preparing for a punitive campaign in Dagestan to avenge the murder of his brother Ibrahim Khan. During his
stop in Gazvin, the Catholic bishops, two Armenian priests, Jewish and Muslim scholars came to bow to him. Nadir met with them, paid for the journey, but complained that at the moment he did not have time to read, formulating his point of view as follows: ‘If Allah is only, then the Prophet must also be only.’ (25, p. 111-112) However, Lockhart, relying on the reports of British sales representatives in Bender Abbas, refers this event to the time when Nadir was in India (27, p. 351).

The author of Bayan-i Vage indicated that Nadir Shah was able to get familiarized with the translations of the Holy Books in Najaf-i Ashraf, where religious figures and scholars gathered, apparently referring to the meeting arranged by Nadir to discuss the sect of Jafari in 1742 in Najaf (25, p. 112). However, this information is erroneous, as there are no references to the presence of scholars from other religious denominations and discussions on the translation of the Holy Books in Najaf either in documentary or narrative sources. However, Khashmiri writes about this from someone else’s words, relying on rumors and unverified information because he could not witness that meeting, which was held in Najaf in 1743: he left the service at Nadir Shah to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in July 1741 (25, p. v).

There are also reports by J. Hanway that Nadir Shah, having read the translations of the Holy Books, ridiculed both Christians and Jews, as well as Muhammad and Ali, saying that the translations show that the Christian faith, like other beliefs, has absurd inner contradictions (8, p. 218-19). Addressing the Jewish, Christian and Muslim followers of the cult, he said with a sneer: ‘If God gives me life, I will create such a religion that will be better than the religions known to mankind!’ (8, p. 216-9). However, it should be noted here that J. Hanway’s information on religious matters seems to be extremely unreliable, since, according to a fair comment by Iranian historian R. Shabani, ‘a careful study of Jonas Hanvey’s information about the religion allow us to conclude that the latter was had extremely limited knowledge of religious matters’ (22, p. 1155).

In one Persian-Judean manuscript of 1760, a record made by Rabbi, a participant in the translation of the Jewish Sacred Books, was preserved that ‘‘At night at the royal meeting, the Head Mullah of the country (Mullahbashi) read and interpreted to the king (Nadir Shah - R. M) from Torah, then from the Psalms, and the king enjoyed (from reading - R. M.). He (Nadir Shah - RM) vowed, saying: ‘I will conquer Russia, restore Jerusalem, and gather all the children of Israel together.’ However, death overtook him and did not allow him to do it’’ (16, p. Xxxvi-xxxvii).

As we can see, the undoubted service of Nadir Shah lies in the constant search for ways to unite different religions. However, it should not forgotten that both in the attempts to unite the Sunnism and Shiism, and in the idea of uniting all religions, about which there are many reports in modern sources, he pursued his political goals. By combining the Shiism and Sunnism, Nadir Shah sought for Ottoman Turkey to recognize Jafarid madhhab as the fifth school of Sunnism. These steps, no doubt, were taken by him to renew friendly relations with the Sunni Ottoman Empire and prepare the ground to become the head of the united Muslim world. His policy was aimed at weakening the Shiite clergy and restoring harmony in the matter of religion. For the successful management and preservation of peace in his empire, Nadir Shah pursued a tolerant policy with regard to various religious groups, especially Christians and Jews.

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Надир шах в отношении религиозных меньшинств

Резюме

Ключевые слова: шиизм, конверсия, Надир Шах, христиане, евреи, зороастрийцы

В этой статье освещается политика Надир-шаха, проводимая в отношении религиозных меньшинств, живших в Иране в ХУШ веке. В целях успешного управления государством и армией, Надир-шах старался создать в стране религиозную целостность. Для этого он пытался понизить роль шиитского духовенства в обществе и объединить шиитов и суннитов, он прикладывал усилие для признания Османской Турцией секты Джафари как пятую суннитскую школу юриспруденции, проводил политику терпимости к представителям различных религиозных общин.