

State-building and economic reforms in medieval Azerbaijan: The legal function of the “Qanunname”

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Abstract: The period of Aq Qoyunluis considered an important stage in the history of Middle East, as well as Azerbaijani statehood. Political and economic strengthening was one of the main tasks in the Aq Qoyunlu state, and for this purpose a special Book of Legislation – “Qanunname” was drafted. Ensuring the development of the country’s economy was one of the main issues in the “Qanunname”. The article studies the economic life of the country during this period, especially during the reign of Hasan Padishah, the economic revival of the people liberated from the Mongol invasions, and the development of trade within the framework of the political-economic relations established between other countries. As for the research methods used in the article, a number of factors that play an important role in the economic development of Aq Qoyunlu state have been studied by preserving the principle of historicity, a comparative analysis of economic-commercial relations through historical-excursion method is given.

Keywords: medieval trade, “Qanunname”, Aq Qoyunlu, Azerbaijan

Introduction

The Aq Qoyunlu Empire occupies a very leading place in the history of Azerbaijan’s statehood. According to the claims of the Aq Qoyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans) sultans, the origin of the Bayandurlu dynasty, which is part of this tribal union, goes back to the Bayandur Khan, who was mentioned in the *Book of Dede Korkut* (Lewis 1974, 19). Aq Qoyunlu tribes settled in a very wide area including

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Azerbaijan, Eastern Anatolia, South Caucasus, Iran, Tigris and Euphrates valleys. As a result of the weakening of the Great Seljuk state, the Aq Qoyunlu became stronger in Eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan. Aq Qoyunlu tribes became the leading political force in Eastern Anatolia at the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century.

The head of the political unity of Aq Qoyunlu tribes was Tur Ali Bey (1388-1392) from the Bayandur tribe, and his successors were the hereditary owners of Diyarbakir province. The foundation of this dynasty was laid by Pahlavan Bey (1370-1388). Alaeddin and Fakhreddin (1392-1394), who came to power after his death, failed to strengthen the tribal alliances. Qara Yulug Osman bey led the battle organized against Qara Qoyunlu. He won the battles with the Qara Qoyunlu and established the power of the Aq Qoyunlu tribal union (Mammadov 1981, 17). Aq Qoyunlu, who became stronger in the fight against the Jalairis and the Qara Qoyunlu, founded the Amid principality, the center of which was Diyarbakir, under the leadership of Qara Yulug Osman Bey.

The establishment of the Aq Qoyunlu principality with its center in Diyarbakir in Eastern Anatolia, and the development path of this state at the beginning of the 15th century under the leadership of Qara Osman in the period before Aq Qoyunlu gained political power in Azerbaijan, has been extensively studied in the scientific studies of Turkic historians. After the death of Qara Osman in 1435, a prolonged struggle between his heirs for the Aq Qoyunlu throne began, and it ended in 1453 with the victory of Uzun Hasan. During the initial phase of Uzun Hasan's rise to power in Aq Qoyunlu principality, feudal disputes did not stop, but Aq Qoyunlu feudal lords had to reckon with Uzun Hasan's great influence. Uzun Hasan, trying to put an end to the internal strife, began to take measures to further strengthen the Aq Qoyunlu principality and expand the territory of this state at the expense of the central territories of Azerbaijan. He managed to unite his nobles closely by giving great privileges and promises (Najafli 2000, 28). Thus, the Aq Qoyunlu principality became an empire during the time of Uzun Hasan (1453-1478) and experienced its most powerful era. Uzun Hasan returned victoriously from his trip to Rum and he took the title "Padishah" (a title of nobility meaning "emperor" in Persian languages) and raised the flag of power on the throne of Azerbaijan (Jannatov 2021, 249). Therefore, he established a powerful empire covering the lands of Azerbaijan, Eastern Anatolia, Iraq, Iran,

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and Eastern Georgia. With this, the reign of the Bayandurlu dynasty, which belongs to the Aq Qoyunlu tribe, began in Azerbaijan. In order to ensure the revival of the country's economy, the “Qanunname” (Legislation) drawn up by Uzun Hasan was one of the important conditions for regulating not only the tax system, but also all the internal affairs of the state. The “Qanunname” had a great role in subordinating military nobles, feudal lords and nomadic tribes to the central government. The importance of this document was so great that it remained in force throughout the 16th century. It later became known as the “Laws of Hasan Padishah”.

Literature review

Important information about the economic history of Azerbaijan in the 15th century is reflected in a number of sources. To study this period, one can refer to the 15th century oriental sources, the works of Azerbaijani, Western European, and Russian travelers. The mentioned sources reflect the political situation and socio-economic life of Azerbaijan at that time.

In this regard, the most reliable sources are Hasan Beg Rumlu's work (2017) “Ahsan al-Tawarikh”, “Kitab-i Diyarbakriya” by Abu Bakr Tehrani, the court historian of Uzun Hasan, “Tarikh-i alamara-yi Amini” by Fazlullah ibn Ruzbihan Khunji (1992), the court historian of Aq Qoyunlu ruler, Sultan Yaqub, “Bazm and Razm” by Aziz ibn Ardashir Astrabadi can be mentioned (Shukurova 2006, 4). One of the other sources on the history of Azerbaijan in the 15th century is the manuscript “Lubb-et-tavarikh” written by Yahya Ghazvini in 1541. Part III of the work, which consists of 4 parts, provides detailed information about the events that took place starting from the 7th century. Here, the history of the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty can be considered important, especially from the point of view of economic history. The work “Kitab talkhis al-asar va ajaib al-malik al-gahhar” by Abdurrashid Ibn Saleh al-Bakuvi, a famous Azerbaijani geographer who lived in the 15th century, provides information about the socio-economic situation of Azerbaijani cities. Sharafkhan Bidlisi's work “Sharafname” deals with the internal life of the Aq Qoyunlu state, the state of the masses, and socio-economic issues (Ibrahimov 1958, 11-15).

In the 15th century, Russian traveler Afanasy Nikitin visited India and spent some time in Azerbaijan. He gave detailed information about the economic situation of Azerbaijan. European travelers Caterino

Zeno (1471), Giosafat Barbaro (1474), Ambrogio Contarini (1475), German traveler Johann Schiltberger, who visited Azerbaijan in the 70s of the 15th century, visited different cities of Azerbaijan and gave valuable information about the socio-economic situation of the city. Ambrogio Contarini's work entitled "A Book of Travel" attracts more attention. In this work, Contarini wrote about the centralization policy implemented during the reign of Aq Qoyunlu state and Uzun Hasan, sharp feudal struggles, and how these struggles affected the economic life of the country. "Rovzat us-safa" ("Garden of Purity") by Mirkhond Muhammad ibn Khavandshah of Bukhara is one of the valuable sources, which was first published in Paris in 1843 and in Mumbai in 1853. M. Israfilov, M. Kazimbey, B. Dorn, N. Khanikov and others studied the inscriptions and epigraphic monuments of Azerbaijan and obtained substantial results (Ibrahimov 1958, 9-13).

The sources of the 1920-1930s are the general and superficial works on the history of Azerbaijan in the 15th century by E. A. Pakhomov, V. M. Sisoiev (Ibrahimov 1958, 11). "Essays on the history of Azerbaijan" published in 1940-50s, I.P.Petrushevski's works "Azerbaijani states in the 15th century" can be shown as the examples. In addition, the studies related to the Azerbaijani history in the 15th century conducted by S. Mustafayev, Y. Mahmudov, M. Heydarov, A. Rahmani, D. Azimli, S. Farzaliyev, M. Ibrahimov, T. Najafli, T. Jafiyev, J. Ismayil and a number of such outstanding scientists attract attention.

Methodology

The qualitative historical-analytical methodology used in the research that integrates the principles of historicism, comparative analysis, and the historical-excursion method. Primary sources such as *Ahsan al-Tawarikh* by Hasan Beg Rumlu, *Kitab-i Diyarbakriya* by Abu Bakr Tehrani, and *Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi Amini* by Fazlullah ibn Ruzbihan Khunji were analyzed to reconstruct the political, economic, and legal dimensions of the Aq Qoyunlu state. In addition, travel notes of European diplomats and merchants, particularly Contarini, Zeno, and Barbaro were used to provide an external perspective on Azerbaijan's economic life and international trade relations during the reign of Uzun Hasan. The research paper applies content and comparative analysis to identify recurring patterns in governance, taxation, and trade regulation across different sources. Emphasis was placed on correlating legal texts and historical chronicles to evaluate the socio-economic role of the "Qanunname." The integration of narrative interpretation with

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structural analysis allows a comprehensive understanding of how state-building and economic reforms under Uzun Hasan contributed to the emergence of centralized administration and sustainable fiscal order in medieval Azerbaijan.

Contribution of “Qanunname” in the economic revival of medieval Azerbaijan

The 13th and 14th centuries were the period of Mongol invasions in Azerbaijan. During such a period, Azerbaijan’s economy declined. As a result, the productive forces of the country were undermined, most of the arable lands were turned into pastures, the producers were deprived of the means of production, and the irrigation systems were destroyed. The invasion of foreign invaders had a negative impact on the socio-economic life of the country. Mongol rulers robbed and plundered the population. During the years when Uzun Hasan came to power, the taxes and duties imposed on the townspeople and peasants were very heavy. The amount of various taxes collected here was increasing. This not only aggravates the situation of the masses of the people, but also causes a decrease in the country’s income and weakens its economic base.

In such a period, the political and economic strengthening of the country was very important among the measures implemented by the Aq Qoyunlu rulers. During the reign of Uzun Hasan (1453-1478), the borders of the Azerbaijani – Aq Qoyunlu state covered a large area stretching from the Caucasus Mountains to the Persian Gulf, from Khorasan to Central Anatolia. The political and economic strengthening of the state was one of the main tasks for him, and he drafted the “Qanunname” in order to ensure the revival of the country's economy. Although the text of the “Qanunname” has not reached our days, it is possible to make an opinion about it according to the information obtained from historical sources.

Uzun Hasan’s laws became famous in Eastern Anatolia under the name “Laws of Hasan Padishah”, and the Ottomans, who captured the area, applied those laws there much later. This fact is clearly stated in the notes made in the editorial notebooks of those provinces (Farzalibeyli 2003, 65). Ensuring the development of the country’s economy was one of the main issues in the “Qanunname”. For this purpose, Uzun Hasan established diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, including the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Venice, and the Grand Duchy of Moscow, the Golden Horde, Poland,

Austria, India, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Egypt and other states.

The adopted “Qanunname” determined the amount of taxes to be collected from the peasants, put an end to the arbitrariness of the officials and ensured that the taxes collected from the population go directly to the treasury. The chronicler Khandemir wrote that as a result of the implemented tax reform, the condition of farmers improved significantly. Arran, Azerbaijan, Persia, Kirman, Ajam and Arab Iraq began to prosper from Uzun Hasan’s ever-increasing justice (Konyalı 1964, 71-72). Defending these views, F. Sumer (1992) writes that Uzun Hasan’s “Qanunname” intended to regulate the taxes collected from peasants, artisans and merchants. He even tried to abolish all military taxes, but met with opposition from civil and military administrators. The laws of Hasan Padishah were used by the Ottomans for a while and by the Safavids for a long time. F. Sumer evaluates this document as an important contribution of the Aq Qoyunlu state to the financial history of the Islamic world (Najafli 2000, 30).

This narrative source called “Qanunname” from the same period describes this legislative effort as commercial, civil, criminal and tax laws. Moreover, from both narrative and documentary materials, it is understood that these regulations, some of them, were in force in Diyar-ı Bakır, Azerbaijan, Arab and Persian Iraq and Persia until the 18th century. Examination of Uzun Hasan’s comprehensive commercial regulations, preserved in 16th century Ottoman laws on Eastern Anatolia, aimed to freeze the sales tax rate and regulate the collection of patronage duties and tolls, to prevent arbitrary practices by regional officials, while encouraging trade and increasing state revenues. At the same time, their efforts to prevent local privileges are clearly felt. The rules governing the silk trade are very significant in this context. Finally, Uzun Hasan’s taxation model on land and products, cattle and sheep herds, mills and irrigation systems were used for a while by the Ottomans, with some changes, as equitable models for peasants, nomads and urbanites. According to J. Woods (1993), laws of Hasan Padishah were commercial, cultural, and penalty and tax laws.

Apparently, the results of the law-giving activity of this ruler far outlived his military deeds in the memory of the peoples of the Near East, such that some Persian historians in the 16th century pointed out that regulations in financial and fiscal matters (*der estefa-ye mal-o-hoquq-e divani qanun est*) established by Uzun Hasan and remained in

force for a long time after death. Even in the early 18th century, distribution of taxes to replenish the treasury of the Safavid court in Isfahan complied with Uzun Hasan's laws. In fact, the Ottoman government kept on applying his directions for some time in the eastern provinces of Asia Minor (Mustafayev 2016, 130).

One of the important places in the central government offices belonged to the prime vizier, who controlled the state's revenues and managed the financial apparatus. He also dealt with the country's foreign affairs and headed civil-administrative departments. As the prime vizier headed the Supreme Court, he was also called “Sahib Diwan”. The seal of the divan was entrusted to him. The sultan's name and nickname were printed on the title of the decree or verdict issued by the rulers, and their seals were printed at the end. At the end of a decree issued by Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan in 1470 (on the left side), the seal of the ruler was stamped, on the back of the decree (on the right side) the seal of the divan was stamped in two places, and below it was the seals of the viziers (Najafli 2000, 32).

The historical role of Azerbaijani - Aq Qoyunlu state in the medieval trade

Trade is one of the few important economic activities necessary to maintain the power of the state. Since ancient times, people have realized the importance of trade and thanks to trade, they have made progress in the fields of science, education, culture, and art. The farsighted ruler Uzun Hasan understood the importance of international economic relations and developed trade by establishing relations with other countries to revive the country economically. With the creation of a centralized state by Uzun Hasan, this process was accelerated. At the same time, new changes and reforms were made in the customs duties obtained from the caravan routes passing through Aq Qoyunlu territory. This had a positive effect on the country's economic well-being.

The large number of irrigation ditches and canals, the restoration of the damaged ones and their return to use opened the way for the development of agriculture, sericulture, cotton growing, viticulture, gardens and melons in the lands of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani sericulture closely connected it not only with the cities of the Near and Middle East, but also with the countries of Southern Europe. The silk produced here was sold in Venice, Bursa, Damascus and a number of other cities, where beautiful fabrics and velvet were woven from it. At that

time, silk was a means of connecting Azerbaijan to the “Great Silk Road” and was the main indicator of the country’s exports. Azerbaijani silk is also sold in Russia; it occupied a prominent place among the goods exported to the territory of this state. Azerbaijan’s silk industry has become an important economic factor in international trade and international labor division (Ganiyev 2019, 134).

In the 15th century, cities such as Shirvan, Shamakhi, Baku, Tabriz, Ardabil, Ganja, Maragha, and Nakhchivan played an important role in the economic life of Azerbaijan. Baku was an important port city on the Caspian coast. Oil, silk, saffron and other goods were exported from here to Astrakhan, Central Asia and Iran. That’s why they called the Caspian Sea the Baku Sea at that time. Abdurrashid al-Bakuvi (1992) reported that at the beginning of the 15th century, daily oil production in Baku was 200 khalvar (one khalvar - about 400 kg) (Mammadov 1981, 23).

The 15th century in Azerbaijan is characterized by the development of crafts, trade and cities. So, as a result of the economic and political relations of the Azerbaijan - Aq Qoyunlu state with the European states during the reign of Uzun Hasan, the city of Tabriz reached a high level of development. Aq Qoyunlu state has established wider diplomatic relations with European countries. There were always delegations and consuls of various European states in the palace of Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan in Tabriz. In the 70s of the 15th century, even Venice, one of the Italian cities, had an embassy in the Aq Qoyunlu Palace. This proves that the diplomatic relations of the Aq Qoyunlu state with other western countries had deep economic roots. The expansion of mutual relations with Europe was also closely related to Aq Qoyunlu - Ottoman relations. These relations arose primarily from trade relations. Trade caravans passing through Tabriz, Aq Qoyunlu capital, went to Trabzon, Bursa, Aleppo, Beirut, Damascus, Tripoli, Konya, etc. as it was associated with the famous shopping centers of the time. In these trading centers where Asian and European merchants met, the merchants of the western countries participating in the Black Sea and Mediterranean trade bought various oriental goods, rare dyes, spices, precious stones, raw silk and various silk fabrics.

As in the past centuries, Tabriz kept its economic place in the life of the entire Middle East. According to historians, the destruction of Astrakhan in 1395 and Baghdad in 1400 by Timur’s troops made the value of Tabriz even greater. As medieval Azerbaijani scholar Abdurrashid al-Bakuvi (1992) mentioned: “Tabriz has strong walls and

amazing buildings. It is the capital of the country of Azerbaijan. There are many rivers, the city is surrounded by gardens”.

The Venetian merchant and diplomat Contarini also mentioned the greatness of the medieval Azerbaijani city of Tabriz. Contarini (1873) wrote: “There are all kinds of food here. There are several markets in the city. A lot of silk is brought here. Later, the silk is taken to the city of Aleppo through a caravan.” In addition to silk and sericulture, cotton and wool woven fabrics, shawls, jewelry, weapons and ornaments were produced in Tabriz. The four-colored piece of Tabriz silk called “Derai-yi kassab” was considered an indicator of all Azerbaijani craftsmanship at that time (Ganiyev 2019, 134).

The establishment of diplomatic relations was a result of the economic development system of Azerbaijan. The relations between Europe and Azerbaijan formed the basis of the East-West system. Azerbaijan had an important role both economically and strategically. Uzun Hasan’s foreign policy is also commendable. Thus, Uzun Hasan established relations with rulers from Europe and met with foreign representatives.

In 1472, Italian politician and diplomat, Uzun Hasan’s ambassador, Caterino Zeno met Polish and Hungarian ambassadors, Marco Russo, the ambassador of Grand Duke Ivan III of Moscow, and Italian Catholic monk Ludovic in Uzun Hasan’s palace (Petrushevski 1951, 71). Caterino Zeno talks about the development of trade here in the 15th century, especially mentioning Tabriz as a trade center (Grey Charles 1873, 166). Venetian merchant and diplomat Ambrosio Contarini writes in the title “Description of Uzun Hasan’s state” that Uzun Hasan’s state was equipped with everything (Barbaro & Contarino 1873, 172). The fact that both diplomats speak well of trade indicates that economic prosperity is good here, that trade continues freely and that the process of export and import is complete.

Aq Qoyunlu’s relations with Christian countries begin with their relations with the Greek state of Trabzon. The emperors of Trabzon maintained extensive contacts with Western countries against the Ottomans, and they also mediated the relations of their dynastic relatives, the Aq Qoyunlu, with European countries. After the conquest of Constantinople, when Trabzon’s relations with the western countries expanded, the Aq Qoyunlu state was also involved in these relations. The relations of the Aq Qoyunlu state with Western countries were expanding. In the 50s and 60s of the 15th century, Uzun Hasan established diplomatic relations with the Greek state of Trabzon, the

Papacy and the Republic of Venice, as well as with Cyprus, Rhodes, Hungary, Albania and other states through their mediation (Mahmudov 1996, 81).

In the second half of the 15th century, Azerbaijani silk played an important role in providing raw materials for the rapidly developing textile manufactures in Italy. It should be noted that Uzun Hasan's special importance to foreign trade shows that he devoted a lot of work to the economic development of the country. During this period, the main place in Azerbaijan's foreign trade was occupied by raw silk. Azerbaijani merchants had the opportunity to trade here not only with merchants from Eastern countries, but also with European merchants. This had an impact on the economic development of the country in general.

In the 15th century, the caravan routes passing through Azerbaijan were of great importance in the trade between Europe and Asia. Therefore, the cities of Tabriz, Maragha and Ardabil were important trade centers. In the 15th century, the main intermediaries in trade with Europe were Italian merchants. A Venetian consul was also appointed to Tabriz. In the second half of the 15th century, due to the conclusion of a military alliance between the Aq Qoyunlu state and Venice, the role of Venetian merchants increased even more (Petrushevski 1951, 93).

Conclusion

Thus, the Aq Qoyunlu tribal alliance, which won the fight against the Jalairis and the Qara Qoyunlu, became a leading political force in Eastern Anatolia and the territory of Azerbaijan in the 15th century. During the reign of Uzun Hasan, the Aq Qoyunlu people began to play an important role in both the political and economic life of Azerbaijan. Aq Qoyunlu ruler Uzun Hasan carried out a number of reforms in order to eliminate economic stagnation in the country, put an end to official arbitrariness, establish justice in tax collection and improve the level of welfare of the population. Among these reforms, the "Qanunname" adopted by Uzun Hasan and later known as "Laws of Hasan Padishah" occupies a very important place. Even this Law, which was used by the Ottomans and the Safavids, remained in force throughout the 16th century.

As it can be seen, the years of rule of Aq Qoyunlu, especially Uzun Hasan, are observed with economic growth. Undoubtedly, the "Qanunname" issued by Uzun Hasan played an important role in

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ensuring this economic growth. Thus, according to the “Qanunname”, the taxes to be collected from the peasants were determined, their amount was specified, and the tax system was relatively relaxed. These reforms almost eliminated the irresponsibility of tax collectors. As a result of this, the situation of peasants and artisans was alleviated, albeit temporarily. As a result, Laws of Hasan Padishah revived productive forces in the country to a certain extent, ensured that the taxes collected from peasants and artisans went directly to the treasury, and the state became economically stronger.

Among the reforms carried out by Uzun Hasan in the field of foreign policy, expansion of diplomatic relations and trade relations with neighboring countries, including European states, was very important. Actually, the expansion of diplomatic relations between the countries led to the development of trade relations. The development of trade had a positive effect on the revival of crafts and productive forces in the country, as well as the economy in general. Thus, the alliance of the Aq Qoyunlu people with the European states against the Ottomans made Azerbaijan one of the leading countries in international trade at that time.

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