

KNIGHTS IN AZERBAIJAN

ARTICLE 4

(15th-17th centuries)

End. Continued from previous issue

The Battle of Turan. A miniature to the poem "Shahnameh". Tabriz, 14th century



The period of Mongol conquests put an end to a variety of institutions of the medieval feudal society. A strong blow was dealt to chivalry. The powerful military system of Genghis Khan, one of the foundations of which was unquestioned obedience and severe discipline, crushed feudal armies in the region from the Pacific coast to the shores of the Adriatic. Neither Muslim nor Eastern nor Western armies could resist the blows of the hitherto unprecedented military machine.

In 1220, Mongol troops under the command of Jebe and Subutai invaded Azerbaijan. The history of Azerbaijan in 1220-1222 when Mongol troops occupied Azerbaijan is replete with examples of courageous resistance by garrisons of the cities of Maraga, Ardabil, Sarab, Khoy, Salmas, Nakhchivan, Beylagan, Ganja and Shamakhi, and heroism by individual detachments of the Azerbaijani states of the Atabays, Ildenizids and Shirvanshahs (1, pp.70- 71). A knight was superior to a man of the Mongol army by the level of individual training. **However, a detachment of knights, where each of the warriors had his own ideas, plans and intentions, acted at their own discretion and at their own risk and was inferior to a detachment of Mongol warriors united by severe discipline and fighting on the basis of a single concept.**

In 1231, a new Mongol army under the command of

*Shah Ismail Khatai in battle. A miniature.
Tabriz, 16th century*

the Chormaqan invaded Azerbaijan (1, pp.72- 73). Once again, the resistance did not bring the expected results. The Mongol troops managed to occupy Azerbaijan. It seemed that chivalry had outlived its usefulness as a military institution.

However, the events of the second half of the 13th-14th centuries showed that chivalry is not only a military phenomenon, but also a social institution generated by feudal society at a certain stage of development. Azerbaijan was included into the Mongol state of Hulaguids and then Jalayirids, but the rulers of these states were unable to create a new form of economic management and returned to the military-feudal system: military service in exchange for a land plot.

At the end of the 14th century, the state of the Shirvanshahs (in the north) revived in Azerbaijan again, and the state of Qara Qoyunlu was created (in the south). Like in the pre-Mongol era, division into classes formed, and the classes of warriors, artisans and farmers were considered the most important groups. Ideologues of the era opposed the wanton military-political expansion, believing that the cause of war should be legal. War or any other form of acute hostility was seen as an extraordinary case, contingency. It was clearly understood that open hostility developing into a direct confrontation leads to irreparable losses - loss of life. Unlike speeches, efforts and money, nobody can recover lives. **The formation of a knight - a warrior of Islam had to take place in the process of an individual educational process** (for more details see V. Akunov's work (2)). This philosophy manifested itself most obviously and clearly in the creation of such an institution of the time as the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire. However, this process is also typical for other countries of the Muslim East. For example, in Egypt, after the victory over the Mongols in the Battle of Ain Jalut, the formation of knights took concrete form.

However, the Battle of Ain Jalut had a huge psychological effect: **the myth of the invincibility of the Mongol army in the field was shaken and such a social institution as Mamluks demonstrated its vitality on condition of centralized governance and strict discipline.**

In Azerbaijan, in the era of the states of Qara Qoyunlu (1410-1467, capital Tabriz) and Ag Qoyunlu (1468-1501, capital Tabriz), chivalry revived as a social institution, albeit in slightly different forms than in the pre-Mongol era. Thus, the pillar of a commander was a guard headed by the gorchu-bashi. According



to Fazlullah Rashid al-Din, the institution of gorchus appeared at the end of the 13th century. Probably, in the case of Ag Qoyunlu, it is necessary to distinguish the guard of the ruler (2,500 "gorchus"), who constantly accompanied the shah, from the state guard ("boy-nukars"), contingents that served in all areas and were the core of the feudal militia of these areas. For example, Muhammad Davani says that in the region of Fars alone in 1476, there were 2,230 boy-nukars under Prince Khalil (3, p.11). Therefore, in the Ag Qoyunlu guard, only the gorchus acted as bodyguards and personal guards of the governor. Military organization of the seignior-vassal type relied on the placement of "people of the sword" ("Ahl-e Shamshir") throughout the country and did not allow them to carry out small, urgent and covert operations. Therefore, the mobile guard was essentially a regular army. This is evidenced by their professional training and expensive equipment, which an ordinary rider could not afford, and by the lack of mentions in sources that gorchus and boy-nukars had to be called



The battle between Ardashir and the son of Ardavan. A miniature to the poem “Shahnameh”. Tabriz, 14th century

up and marshaled. Therefore, the permanent guard was recruited by conscription from among the most reliable military-nomadic Turkic tribes. The second and most numerous part of the army was the feudal cavalry militia (“cheriks”). It was formed from troops of vilayats (provinces), as well as troops of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes (3, p.12). **The basis of the cherik militia was formed by the suzerain handing out land plots to his vassals and the latter’s duty to serve in exchange for the land they received.** At first glance,

such a system was advantageous for the state, because agabays brought in troops, undertook most of the expenses on them and greatly facilitated the military spending of the state. The ruler got warriors and officers with little money. However, the advantages of such a system showed only with the presence of a strong, authoritarian central government. The head of feudal troops faced the most difficult question of human relations: how to organize control over individuals, each of whom had an armed force? Naturally, this largely

Battle scene on the paintings in the Palace of Shaki Khans. 18th century



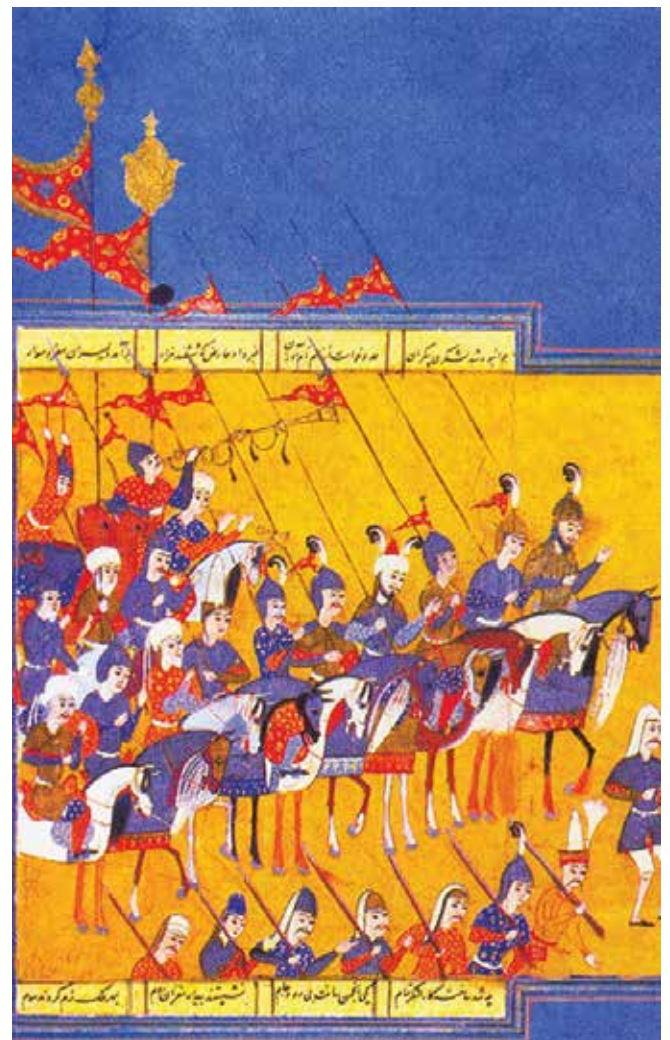
Battle scene on the paintings in the Palace of Shaki Khans. 18th century

depended on the personal authority of the commander. A stepped system was created in the feudal army, and each step in it had a certain contingent of armed men. Since vilayats were different by their territory, economic power and population, the number of cheriks in each vilayat was different. How many warriors should come to the meeting point? - This question was decided by the suzerain himself. He was well aware that his political weight and authority will be largely determined by the quality and quantity of the men he brings. This factor helped collect national troops. Besides that, the state tried wherever possible to encourage suzerains who brought in more warriors (auxiliary contingent fee, gifts, etc.) and to have a certain idea about the mobilization potential of the regions and the country as a whole. To this end, during parades and while handing out salaries, the number of warriors and their equipment were checked. Probably, a feudal lord who brought in fewer soldiers during several checks than the economic potential of his land plot allowed lost his land plot. The land plot also was taken away if the feudal died or committed treason. In case of death, the land plot was handed over to his son, who had to serve instead of his father.

Unlike Western Europe, the development of knights in the East did not impede the development of light cavalry and created a unit called "visak". This unit consisted of a knight and his squire, several lightly armed horsemen ("jarida"), several infantrymen ("yaya") and several servants ("kullugchu"). The number of personnel in a visak depended on the financial potential of a knight. As a result, a knight in a visak was not so much the commander as the first warrior. Knights in the Ag Qoyunlu army were called "pushandar" ("armorbearer"), nukar ("friend" and then "armed servant") or "mulazim" ("vassal") (3, p.13-14).

The individual training of a feudal warrior was classic. According to tradition, when a boy turned 3, his father put him on a horse in a festive atmosphere for the first time. Until age 7, the boy played with wooden models

The army begins a military campaign. A miniature, 17th century. Riflemen can be seen in the foreground



Minuchihr kills his uncle. A miniature to the poem "Shahnameh". Tabriz, 15th century



of weapons, and at 7, he was awarded the first real weapon (children's armor occupies a significant place in collections of weapons) and began to learn to wield it. At the same time, he was taught the grammar of the language, history and literature, and his first teachers were his father, uncle or a designated professional warrior. From age 10, the boy was taught everything a knight needed to know. As a teenager, the boy was taken for a hunt where he honed his skills of archery and learnt to be immune to the sight of blood. The acquired knowledge was also developed in military and sports games and competitions held on the meydan. At 14, it

was possible to enroll him in a light cavalry detachment, the retinue of a knight (usually a relative or suzerain) and take him to war. By 17-18, he was considered a professional soldier, was trained to use heavy weapons and could be knighted by 20. Receiving a knightly sword, belt and spurs, the young warrior was included on lists of the military divan as a contender for a land plot (3, p.25).

However, **the revival of chivalry as a military-social institution required not only an economic basis, but also a spiritual and moral level of the development of society or some part of it.** According

to medieval notions, a knight is not only a professional soldier, but also a man of high moral principles who adheres to certain ethical standards and fights for ideals. And Sufism played its role here.

Sufism is a religious philosophy of deep idealistic content. The main task of Sufism is to provide man with knowledge that secures the priority of public interests over private interests and to form a harmoniously developed personality who is a full part of society and

nature. (4, pp.34- 35)

Promoting asceticism and renunciation of luxury and excess, Sufism helped educate a person, seeking the most appropriate behavior of a warrior of Islam in critical situations. In order to address a critical situation in a timely manner and effectively, it is necessary to predict or identify a danger in order to get some extra time to prepare to repel or neutralize this danger. A knight must learn to anticipate a critical situation and

Death of Piran. A miniature to the poem "Shahnameh". Tabriz, 16th century



deal with it immediately (2).

The creation of spiritual unions and orders based on the teachings of Sufism took place during the 14th-15th centuries. In Azerbaijan, by the early 16th century, sheikhs of the Ardebil Order Safaviyya had the greatest power and influence. Although the first military campaigns ended in the defeat and death of the heads of the Order, Sheikh Juneyd and Sheikh Heydar, eventually members of the Order rallied around the grandson of Sheikh Heydar, Ismayil, and created the Safavid state, the first capital of which was the city of Tabriz. Ismayil, who ruled under the name of **Shah Ismayil I in 1501-1524, appears as a knight-ruler in the annals, diplomatic correspondence and folk epics.** This was the dream of

philosophers of the time.

While training warriors of the army, a lot of attention was paid to psycho-physical training. Great importance was attached to the ability of a warrior to correctly decode and control his emotions. Much attention in the process of learning was paid to the struggle against fear. The struggle against negative emotions was conducted through suggestion and autosuggestion, widely using prayers, exercises, games and rituals. The system of military punishments and rewards was aimed, on the one hand, at preventing military offenses and crimes and on the other, at increasing the interest of soldiers in the zealous implementation of their military duty. The focus was not on the development of punishment for

Minuchihr begins a military campaign. A miniature to the poem "Shahnameh". Tabriz, 16th century



Battle scene on the paintings in the Palace of Shaki Khans. 18th century

military offenses, but on the improvement of incentives for warriors (2).

The whole system of ideological work among warriors was designed to maintain the morale of warriors at a high level, while stressing the advantage of the living word over other methods of command. To maximize the cohesion of their army, it was recommended that commander must use kinship and tribal ties.

Serious ideological work formed the basis of the army of the Safavid state, and it is the presence of ideological fighters - knights by vocation - that largely contributed

to the success of this state.

The decline of chivalry as a social institution came in the 17th century due to the failure of all components of this institution. For example, the first severe blow was the restriction of the influence of military-nomadic tribes - the main "supplier" of knights under the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). The central state apparatus also became stronger under him, seriously restricting the influence of military-religious orders and Sufi centers. He also limited the practice of handing out land plots, especially to military-nomadic tribes (1, pp.124 -125). And finally, the final blow was the spread

Battle scene on the paintings in the Palace of Shaki Khans. 18th century

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of firearms. From the very appearance of this weapon, it was met with hostility. The rejection of firearms was explained by common characteristic features of the feudal system ("the creation of the devil" was considered unworthy of men of honor; it could put an end to the military domination of feudal lords as the ruling class) and tactics of mounted troops. The heavy outcome of the Ag Qoyunlu-Ottoman and then Safavid-Ottoman wars forced some changes in relation to the new type of weapon, but still the use of firearms was fragmented. The military reform when detachments of gun shooters (12,000 shooters) and artillery (500 cannons) were set up deprived the knights of military superiority - any person, who had no military training, but was armed

with a rifle was able to shoot a knight - a professional soldier - at a distance (1, p.123). In the Azerbaijani epic "Koroglu", the protagonist, people's avenger, endowed with a knight's traits, picking up a gun and learning that it can kill a man at a distance, noted that with the advent of guns, courage disappeared (5). Interestingly, according to experts, the epic was not formed before the 17th century (6). Thus, the totality of the above facts indicates that **chivalry as a social institution in Azerbaijan disappeared in the 17th century.**

Interestingly, the term "chivalry" was repeatedly used for national Azerbaijani regiments in the Russian army. For example, in 1914, a cavalry regiment of Azerbaijanis was formed. The governor of Yelizavetpol, G. S. Kovalev,

Battle scene on the paintings in the Palace of Shaki Khans. 18th century



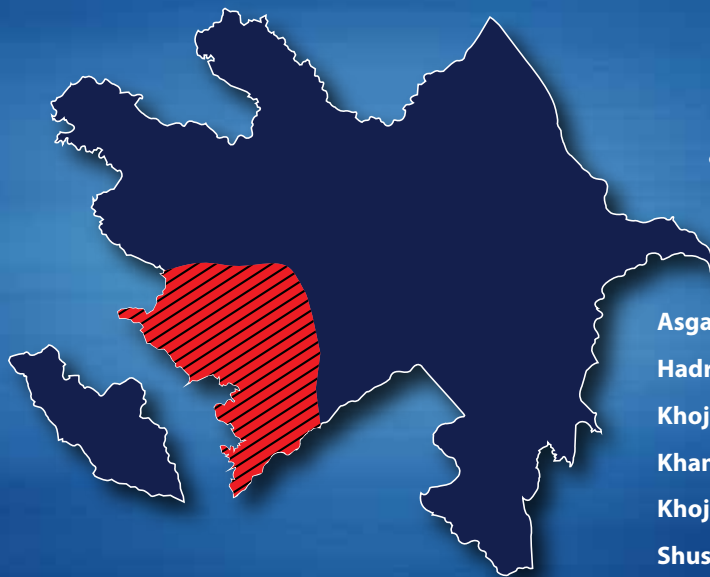
wrote of it in a telegram to Major General Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich on 10 September 1914: "Muslims flatter themselves with the hope that with God's help, they ... will give 'enlightened enemies' lessons of chivalry and honor..." (7). The first commander of the regiment, Peter Polovtsov, said in his address to Azerbaijanis in the fall of 1917: "From the Caucasus and from your heroic service in the war, I know your character is knightly and noble, protects those mistreated and is proud of its honor - this is the face of glorious representatives of the Caucasus, whom I have the honor to command... On arrival at home, you must remember that you will be looked upon as models of true warriors. The fame of your feats of arms has made you known among the people. From you they will learn discipline and order. Knowing your character and self-esteem, I am sure that you will bring forth an example of this discipline and show yourselves as worthy of your military past..."

In later times, the term "chivalry" ("cengaverlik" in Azerbaijani) was used and is still being used as a symbol of nobility and courage. ❁

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THERE IS NO AZERBAIJAN WITHOUT KARABAKH



Azerbaijani districts
occupied by Armenia
and dates of their occupation

Asgaran – 1991	Agdara – 07.07.1993
Hadrut – 1991	Agdam – 23.07.1993
Khojavand – 1991	Kalbajar – 02.04.1993
Khankandi – 1991	Fuzuli – 23.08.1993
Khojaly – 26.02.1992	Jabrayil – 23.08.1993
Shusha – 08.05.1992	Gubadli – 31.08.1993
Lachin – 18.05.1992	Zangilan – 29.10.1993