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KNIGHTS IN AZERBAIJAN

ARTICLE 2

(5TH-11TH CENTURIES)

AT THE TIME WHEN AZERBAIJAN WAS PART OF THE SASSANID STATE, CHIVALRY WAS TAKING SHAPE AS A PARTICULAR SOCIAL PHENOMENON. AZAD KNIGHTS FORMED A SINGLE CLASS OF WARRIORS (IN PERSIAN - ARTESHTARAN).



Sasani knight (right) (Kaveh Farrokh)

Arteshtarans' sons, wealthy and noble people could get into this closed class; having no noble origin and fortune, only outstanding personalities could get into the class of arteshtarans. This resulted in

azads developing inherent elements of caste psychology (1, p. 111).

The incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Arab



caliphate in the 7th century slowed down the formation of chivalry because under the first caliphs, the Muslim community (ummah) did not welcome the stratification of society on any grounds. However, the caliphate was a feudal state, and from the middle of the 8th century, the basis of its military power was formed not by Arab tribes, as it was before, but by professional soldiers who received the right to own land for their service - «iqta». An iqtadar either went to war himself or sent his sons. An iqtadar was a heavily armored warrior, while the soldiers whom he recruited or who accompanied him were mostly lightly armed. Knights were referred to as «farises» (literally, «horsemen»), while his companions were referred to as «chakirs» («shakirs», literally «companion») (2, p. 21). The bigger the iqta a knight owned, the more warriors he had to bring along. Knights - warriors of the khan's militia in the epic «Kitabi Dada Gorgud» - are referred to as «yigits», «nokers» and «ers»: «Bəhadır, dəlü, yaxşı yigit idi» («A hero, a brave man, a good soldier»); «Nökər gəldi, nayib gəldi» («The warrior is back, the commander of fifty is back»); «Bu məhəldə Oğuz ərənləri alay-alay gəldi» («Here come Oguz soldiers squad after squad») (3, p. 98, 158, 175). Each of these terms has its own slightly different meaning. For example, the term «yigit» was used to mean a «warrior», a «young man», a «brave person». The term retained these meanings over the centuries and turned into the form «yigit». The meaning of the term «noker» underwent a

more significant transformation. Until the 18th and early 19th centuries, the term meant a «warrior», an «armed servant», but later and at the present time it simply means a «servant». The term «er» means a «warrior», although the latter term also means a «man».

As the Arab Caliphate weakened in the 9th century, a number of independent states emerged in Azerbaijan - the states of the Shirvanshahs, Sajids, Salaris, Ravvadids and Shaddadids. They were all feudal states and it was during the 9th-11th centuries that knights in Azerbaijan emerged as a special social phenomenon.

The Oguz heroic epic «Dada Gorgud» sheds light on the particularities of medieval knights in Azerbaijan. As the epic shows, the most important thing that a knight should have – is a warhorse and a full set of defensive and offensive weapons: «Qonur atın vergil mana! Altmış tutam göndərüni vergil mana! At alaca qalqanını vergil mana! Qara polat uz qılıcın vergil mana! Sadağında səksən oqın vergil mana! Ağ tozluca qatı yayın vergil mana! Kafərə mən varayım» («Give me your brown horse! Give me your spear at sixty tutams! Give me your mottled shield! Give me your black sword of steel! Give me your quiver of eighty arrows! Give me a strong bow with a white bowstring! I'll go against the giaours.») (3, p. 54)

A horseman wore a helmet on his head («İshiq», «Tulqa», «Tark»): «Başımda qunt işıqlar saqlardım səninçün» («I kept a strong helmet on my head for you»)



A battle between a knight and a dragon. An image in an 11th century plate found during archaeological excavations in Shamkir

(3, p. 94). Some soldiers wore helmets with battle masks, which were described with the Turkic term «qapaq» or with the Persian term «niqab». Helmets with battle masks were mentioned in chronicles, depicted in miniatures (for example, on the miniatures of the miniature artist Abdul Momin Khoyi to the ballad «Varga and Gulshah», recorded in the 12th century in the Azerbaijani town of Khoy), were found in archaeological sites and are kept in museum collections.

Next, a warrior put on armor - «Demir Don» («Iron Dress»): «Əgri bək dəmir tonım saqlardım bu gün üçün» («I kept my strong iron armor for this day»). The epic mentions yarag-type armor: «Altmış yaraqlı adam seçdilər» («They selected sixty soldiers in armor») (3, p. 94, 163). The dictionary of Mahmud al-Kashgari says that the term «yarak» is a common name for the chain mail and plate armor (4, p. 751). The epic mentions javshan-type armor: «Kim atın binər, kim cövşən geyər» («Who sits on a horse, who wears javshan») (3, p. 101). The Persian term «joushan» in the 7th-12th centuries was used to refer to plate and later plate-ringed armor. Weapons specialist D. Nicolle considers javshan to be the «classic armor of

Turko-Persian area» (2, p. 31).

The warrior wore a metallic waistband («gushag»), breastplate («yagalik»), put greaves on his legs («garujig», «budlug»), kneepieces («dizchik»), shoulder straps on his arms («chiginler»), vambraces («yen», «golchag», «bazubend»): «Gün gəldi, yen-yaqalar dikdürəyim səniçün» («The day has come and I will make vambraces and breastplates for you»); «Dizcik, qarucıq bağlandı» («He tied kneepieces and greaves»); «Turun durmadı, çigninə qılıc endirdi. Geyimini kəsdi, omuzına dörd parmaq dəklü zəxm urdı» («He lowered his sword on the shoulder strap of Gazan. He ripped up his armor and inflicted a wound with a depth of four fingers on his shoulder»). (3, p. 94, 161, 177)

The set of weapons always contained a shield («galkhan»). The shield was not only a defensive weapon, but was also used as a «passport», since the coat of arms was painted on it and generally, the shield was very brightly decorated. In the epic, such a shield is indicated as «at alaja galkhan»: «Give me your fancy (mottled) shield!» («At alaca qalqanını vergil mana!») (3, p. 54).

A knight's horse was protected by armor - metal or made of wool and fabric: «Qara ayğırı yarağla gətürdilər» («They brought a black horse in armor») (3, p. 70). The full metal armor for a warhorse consisted of a headband and armor that covered the body. Horse armor, as a rule, was made of rings and plates, while headband was made of steel with mobile plates and was called «Alin zireh». The presence of such horse armor is confirmed by written and pictorial sources. Miniature artists carefully depicted parts of horse armor writing out the front strap and details of its decoration with particular diligence.

Thus, a knight of the 9th-11th centuries was a fully armored rider protected from head to toe. Images of such horsemen are frequent for Turkic areas.

A knight had one or two examples of long-range, medium-range and short-range weapons: a bow and arrows, lasso, spear, dart, gurz (mace), sword (saber), teber (ax), and a dagger or a combat knife.

Among the samples of individual offensive weapons of medieval knights, the saber had a special place and in the epic «Dada Gorgud» it was referred to as «kilich»: «Qılıcını nə ögərsən, məra kafər!» («Why are you boasting of your saber (sword), giaour?!»). The warrior had a dagger and a combat knife: «Basatın xəncəri vardı» («Basat had a dagger»); «Oğlan bıçağına əl urdı» («The guy touched his knife with his hand»). (3, p. 38, 50, 143)

The epic mentions spears like «jida», «gender», «sungu»: «Altmış tutam sür cidasın qoltuq qısub»

(Clutching his red spear with a length of sixty tutams in the armpit»). (3, p. 135)

The warrior also had a battle ax («deper»): «Dəli bəg dilədi ki, Dədəyi dəpərə çala» («Dali bay wanted to hit the grandpa with an ax»). Compared with the ax in the epic «Dada Gorgud», impact weapons such as «chomag», «chovgan» and «gurz» are mentioned more often: «Güni gəldi, qaba çomaq altında yoğradım senin için»; («The day has come for me to fight for you with a large mace»); «Əgri başlu çovkanımca gəlməz manal!» («For me it (i.e. the sword) does not compare with my chovgan with a curved finial!»), «Altı pərlü gürzini ələ aldı, oğlanun üzərinə sürdi» («He picked up the mace and headed towards the lad»). (3, p. 50, 70, 94, 156) For fighting on large and medium distances, the characters of the epic used a bow and arrows, as well as a lasso. Several fragments describe in detail the materials from which the bow, referred in the epic as «yay», was made: «Tol tolara girdigim, Tolar əri, doxarlıyı qodığım, Yağı yordı əlümdə qıl kişlim, ayğır malı, Ayğır verüb alduğım, ağ tozlu qatı yayım. Buğa verüb alduğım boğma kirişim» («I participated in so many battles, chased each armed person, tokhar, the bow with a hairy bowstring in my hands, which wore down the enemy, you are worth a stallion, I gave a stallion for you, my strong aspen onion. I gave a bull for you, taut bowstring»). The lasso in the epic is referred to as «orkan» and as «gil sijim» (literally, «hair loop»): «Qıl orğan ağ boynına taqdılar» («They threw a hairy noose on his white neck») (3, p. 82, 96).

Fully equipped knights in each area or nomadic tribe gathered at the appointed place at the request of the governor (feudal lord) and formed teams. Judging by the epic «Dada Gorgud», detachments consisted of forty to three hundred professional soldiers: «Buğac bəg yerindən uru turdi. ... Bədəvi atın tuturdi, butun bindi. Qırq yigitin boynuna aldı» («Bugach bay jumped up from his seat ... He caught and saddled a nomadic horse. He took forty of his warriors with him»); «Qırq ala gözlü yigidin Uruz boynuna aldı» («Uruz took his forty light-eyed warriors with him») (3, p. 45, 92).

All the knights of the state, who received an iqta, were recorded in the register of the military ministry - «divan al-jaysh.» The military ministry had a unit called «divan al-ard», whose head «arid al-ard» held parades of soldiers checking their availability, the condition of weapons and horses (5, p. 148).

The combined army of knights (goshun) was radically different from the usual militia (cheri), consisting of ordinary soldiers, as well as hired troops who served

khans and bays for a fee, and is referred to in the epic as «alufachiler» (from the Arabic word «Ulufe», which means fodder for cavalry): «Beş aqçalu əlüfəcilər yoldaş etdin» («You employed riders who serve for five pieces of silver») (3, p. 135). The above fragment has even a shade of contempt, meaning a knight should not employ mercenaries. In the State of the Shirvanshahs, hired troops were called «suluki» (5, p. 148).

In order to master all kinds of weapons, a knight had to constantly practice - in daily exercises with weapons, in horse racing and in games of polo - chovgan, wrestling: «Oğlum Uruz oq atanda puta qalmış. Oğuz beğləri at çapanda meydan qalmış» («There is a target left where my son Uruz fired arrows. There is a stadium left where Oguz bays staged horse races») (3, p. 52). The ability to use arms was a matter of pride: «... oğlumın at səgirdişin, qılıc çalışsın, oq atışın görəyim...» («... If I saw my son ride a horse (what kind of rider he is), wield a sword and fire arrows...»). (3, p. 40)

Gradually the knights began to form their own knightly psychology and morality. For example, it was forbidden to launch attacks without the permission of

*A Turkic horseman in the 9th century.
Reconstruction by K. Ahmetzhan*



the superior lord: «Dəstursızca yağıya girmək bizim eldə eyb olur» («For our people it is a shame to attack the enemy without permission») (3, p. 128). Mercy for the defeated enemies was highly valued: «Qaçanını Qazan bəg qomadı, aman deyəni öldürmədi» - «Gazan bay did not pursue (the enemies who fled the battlefield) and did not kill those who begged for mercy» (3, p. 62).

The Knight's Code strictly regulated the social status of combatants. Each knight not only chose an equal match, but was scrupulous in the matter of who helped him in battle. The epic «Dada Gorgud» provides the following example: Shepherd Garaja offered to help ruler Gazan Khan, who was in a difficult situation, and to fight together against the enemy, but he said it was wrong for a bay to fight together with a commoner: «Qazan fikr eylədi, aydır: «Əgər çobanla varacaq olursam, Qalın Oğuz bəgləri bənim başıma qaqınc qaxarlar. Çoban bilə (olmasa) Qazan kafəri alamazdı», - deyərlər» (Gazan thought, «If I go (to war) with a shepherd, the other Oguz bays will laugh at me, they will say, «Without the shepherd Gazan would not have defeated the giaours») (3, p. 55). He turned the shepherd down, and when he finally decided to follow the khan, Gazan tied him to a tree.

The ideal knight was a warrior, who «did not retreat before a black steel strong sword, did not turn away in front of a taut bow with a white bowstring and did not retreat before a sharp arrow with white feathers» («Qara polad uz qılıcdan qayıtmıyan, Ağca tozlu qatı yaydan dərşinmiyən. Ağ yeləkli ötkün oxdan qayıqmıyan»). (3, p. 123)

Knightly traditions also influenced forms of warfare. For example, a battle began with a duel of elected heroes. The epic «Dada Gorgud» states: «Həman burada Qazan at meydana sürdi, qırım dilədi» («Gazan immediately entered the field on horseback and caused the enemy to fight») (3, p. 175). A knight could call any specific fighter

A duel of knights. Miniature from the manuscript "Varga and Gulshah"



for a duel or he threw down the gauntlet that could be picked up to any fighter: «Üç oq, Boz oq qarşulaşdılar. Aruz aydır: Mənim İç Oğuzda qırımım Qazan olsun! Əmən aydır: Mənim qırımım Tərs Uzamış olsun! Alp Rüstəm aydır: Mənim qırımım Ənsə qoca oğlu Oqçı olsun! - dedi. Hər biri bir qırım gözətədi» («The Uch Ok and Boz Ok tribes came to blows. Aruz shouted: Let Gazan be my opponent among the internal Oguz! Emen shouted: Let Ters Uzamish be my opponent! Alp Rustam shouted: Let Okchi, the son of Ense Khoja, be my opponent!»). (3, p. 184)

Knights jousted according to the rules: «Altı pərlü gürzini ələ aldı, oğlanın üzərinə sürdi. Oğlan qalqanını gürzə qarşu tutdı. Yuqarudan aşağı kafər oğlanı qatı urdı. Qalqanını avatdı, tuğulqasını yoğurdu, qapaqların sıyırdı, oğlanı alımadı. Gürzlə döğışdilər, qara polad uz qılıc ilə tartışdılar, sərpə-sərpə meydanda qılıclaşdılar, giginləri toğrandı, qılıcları avandı, bir-birin alımadı. Qarğu talı süğülər ilə qırışdılar, meydanda buğa kibi süsəşdilər, köksləri diləndi, süğüləri sındı, bir-birin alımadılar. At üzərindən ikisi qarvaşdılar, tartışdılar ... Oğlan kafəri götürdi, yerə urdı» («He picked up the club and headed towards the young man. The young man put his shield under the club. The giaour dealt a strong blow to the young man from above. He broke the shield, shattered the helmet and damaged the mask, but failed to overcome the young man. They fought with clubs, exposed black steel sharp sabers and fought with the sabers on the field, their shoulders straps were cut to pieces and the sabers were broken, but they failed to overcome each other. They fought with spears from willow cane, began stabbing each other on the field like bulls, their breasts were pricked and their spears were broken, but they failed to overpower each other. Being on horseback, they grabbed each other and began to fight ... the young man raised the giaour and hit him on the ground»). (3, p. 156-157)

Jousting knights are often portrayed in medieval Azerbaijani miniatures. For example, in the miniatures to the manuscript «Varga and Gulshah», the artist expertly portrayed not only the equipment and outfit of the knights, but also the weapons they used to fight.

A boy was from a noble family could become a knight at 15, as evidenced by the epic «Dada Gorgud»: «On beş yaşına girdi, yigit oldı» («He turned fifteen and became a warrior») (3, p. 133). Commoners could obtain the status of a knight only if they were outstanding personalities and demonstrated wonders of courage as ordinary soldiers. It is appropriate to give an example from the same epic: warrior Gazan rescues a peaceful camp of



women and children from a raging bull, including the daughter of the supreme Khan Bayandur for which the elder of the clan gives him a name by which he becomes a member of the tribal nobility.

The desire to stand out from the crowd led to the emergence of heraldic features. Banners, clothing and billboards depicted animals that had a symbolic meaning. For example, the 7th century historian Moses Kalankatli, who described history and everyday life in the state of Caucasian Albania, pointed out that "noblemen raised their banners with images of animals" (6, p. 198, 287-289). According to the 10th century historian Hamza of Isfahan, the Sassanids, handing over lands adjacent to the Derbent passage as a hereditary fee to several local feudal lords, presented them with special clothing depicting an animal, which is why these feudal lords were called Vahranshah (boar prince), Shirvanshah (lion prince), Filanshah (elephant prince) and Alanshah (crow prince) (1, p. 103 -105).

In the second half of the 11th century, Azerbaijan was incorporated into the Seljuk Empire. The formation of traditions of chivalry among Oguz nomads, who were caught in a settled environment, was reflected in a number of written sources, including in the work "Divan lugat at-Turk" by Mahmud al-Kashgari (7, p. 88).

The chronicler Al-Ibri wrote of Seljuks: "Their main advantage lies in the art of war and the manufacture of weapons of war. They are more skillful than all in riding horses and the most dexterous in dealing stabbing and chopping blows and shooting" (8, p. 144-145).

The military organization of the Seljuk state was the strongest in the world at the time. Originally it was based on military-nomadic tribes, but with the expansion of the

empire the organizing principle changed. For example, the vizier of the state Nizam al-Mulk conducted reforms whereby he linked the system of taxation with the military organization of the state. As a result, "Divan al-Jaysh", as before, was in charge of the distribution of iqta lands, made lists of iqtdars and checked their combat readiness (5, p. 211).

A number of independent states emerged on the ruins of the Seljuk Empire, and one of them was the Azerbaijani state of the Atabays (the State of Eldenizid Atabays). The military reforms conducted here raised the institute of chivalry to a new, more advanced stage. 🌟

(to be continued)

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