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THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND GOVERNANCE OF AZERBAIJAN DURING THE SELJUK PERIOD IN TURKISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

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This article analyzes how the political system and governance model of Azerbaijan during the Seljuk period were conceptualized in Turkish historiography. With the establishment of the Great Seljuk development in the South Caucasus in the 11th–12th centuries, the political-strategic economic and governance structures of Azerbaijan were reshaped as a new empire. The main objective of the study is to determine how the Seljuk state mechanism of Azerbaijan was presented as a material part in the works of Turkish historians, in what theoretical framework the center-administration relations were explained, and on what institutional foundations the practice of regional governance was based. The article examines the approaches of the leadership of Turkish historiography to the iqta system, military-feudal organization, provincial administration, tax mechanisms, and the functioning of judicial-legal structures. At the same time, such theoretically important dimensions as the synthesis of nomadic Turkic political traditions and Islamic state institutions, the basis of the legitimacy of the sultan's power, and the role of the bureaucratic apparatus are examined. The study includes both an interpretation of classical research and modern methodological approaches - both institutional and historical perspectives. In Turkish historiography, Azerbaijan is presented not only as a geographical periphery of the Seljuk Empire, but also as a place of strategic disadvantage in political and economic terms. In this context, the article shows that the governance model of Azerbaijan is formed under the influence of local socio-political realities, along with the regional manifestation of the general system. As a result, the study allows us to understand the essence of state-building in the South Caucasus during the Seljuk period in a more systematic and conceptual way.

Keywords: Seljuk Empire, Azerbaijan, political system, governance, turkish historiography, iqta system, turko-islamic state tradition, medieval state formation.

Introduction. Starting from the 11th century, the Seljuk expansion into the Middle East and the South Caucasus initiated a new phase in the political history of Azerbaijan. The consolidation of Seljuk authority in the region was not limited to military dominance; it also entailed the restructuring of existing administrative traditions and the establishment of an imperial political framework. Owing to its strategic location and economic significance, Azerbaijan became an important component of the Seljuk state system. In Turkish historiography, the development of the Seljuk political order in Azerbaijan is generally interpreted as a synthesis of ancient Turkic political traditions and Islamic state institutions. Scholars analyze issues such as the legitimacy of sultanic authority, center–province relations, and the role of the military-political elite within this broader framework. Azerbaijan is portrayed not merely as a provincial unit but as a significant regional space where imperial governance was implemented and institutionalized.

The importance of this topic also lies in the long-term impact of Seljuk administrative principles on subsequent Turkic-Muslim states. Therefore, examining Azerbaijan's political status and governance under Seljuk rule contributes both to regional historiography and to a broader understanding of medieval Turkic-Islamic state traditions. This article aims to systematize Turkish historiographical

approaches to the political system and governance of Azerbaijan during the Seljuk period and to analyze their theoretical and methodological foundations.

Main discussion. Conceptual Analysis of the Political Administration of Azerbaijan during the Seljuk Period in Turkish Historiography. In Turkish historiography, the Seljuk polity is generally described as a distinctive, centralized, and military-feudal system of governance. A substantial body of scholarship has examined the institutional structure of the Seljuk state, its political authority, and its administrative organization [2, 36]. Among the major works addressing these issues is *Selçuklu Devletleri Tarihi* by A. Sevim and E. Merçil, published by the Turkish Historical Society. In its discussion of state organization, the authors emphasize that Seljuk political authority rested upon older Turkic conceptions of sovereignty, according to which the realm was regarded as the collective patrimony of the ruling dynasty. Within this framework, the sultan emerged as the supreme and singular representative of the state, embodying both political authority and responsibility for public order [8].

Drawing on Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatnama*, Turkish historians underline the religious dimension of Seljuk kingship, highlighting the belief that sovereignty was divinely sanctioned. The sultan, as God's chosen ruler, was entrusted with maintaining justice and stability. This interpretation situates the Seljuk political system within a continuum of pre-Islamic Turkic traditions adapted to an Islamic imperial context [11]. In contrast, some Azerbaijani scholars, such as Rauf Huseynzade, have emphasized the broader Near Eastern administrative heritage of the Seljuk state. In his work *The Caucasus and the Seljuks*, he argues that Seljuk governance incorporated institutional practices derived from the Sasanian, Byzantine, and Abbasid traditions, presenting the Seljuk polity as a synthesis of multiple imperial models rather than a predominantly Turkic continuation [12, 123-145]. Research further indicates that Seljuk sultans consolidated their authority through mechanisms such as the military iqta system, which allocated land revenues to commanders in return for service, thereby extending control over provinces. The administrative structure of the Great Seljuk Empire evolved into a dual system composed of a central apparatus -organized around the Great Divan- and a provincial framework governed by appointed officials. While the sultan held extensive powers, especially under Tughril Beg and Alp Arslan, the effective penetration of state authority into newly conquered territories remained uneven, reflecting the empire's rapid expansion and its reliance on tribal and military networks [7].

Each province was governed by a vali, who was regarded as the deputy of the sultan and bore responsibility for the full range of administrative, fiscal, and judicial affairs within his jurisdiction. In both the Seljuk and subsequent Atabeg periods, provincial governors were predominantly of Turkic origin. Prior to their appointment, many had served as military commanders, reflecting the close interconnection between military authority and civil administration within the Seljuk political order. The duties of a vali extended beyond mere territorial oversight. He was expected to safeguard public order, ensure the implementation of Islamic legal norms, promote social stability, and uphold justice among the population [9, 60]. Among his principal obligations were the protection of subjects, the enforcement of religiously sanctioned regulations, the maintenance of equitable governance, and the punishment of criminal elements. Thus, provincial administration combined political authority, military command, and moral responsibility within a unified framework of governance [3; 4, 85].

Azerbaijan, as one of the provinces of the Great Seljuk Empire, was integrated into this broader administrative structure. The organization of governance in the region generally corresponded to the imperial model, with centrally appointed officials exercising authority in accordance with Seljuk state principles. While local conditions inevitably influenced practical implementation, the fundamental administrative logic remained aligned with the centralized and military-feudal character of the Seljuk state [2; 6].

In the Seljuk administrative framework, governors appointed to Azerbaijan organized provincial governance in accordance with the central imperial model. Acting as deputies of the sultan, they exercised authority through a structured bureaucratic apparatus that mirrored the institutions of the capital. Provinces were administered via a provincial divan, conceived as a continuation of the central Great Divan. This body operated under the authority of the governor and was typically headed by a vizier [1, 68; 7]. Subordinate financial and supervisory offices—responsible for revenue collection,

fiscal auditing, and oversight—functioned alongside judicial authorities such as qadis. The governor was charged with maintaining order, ensuring the proper collection of taxes, supervising officials, and safeguarding justice. While fiscal rates were determined by central authority, provincial administrators were responsible for their lawful and timely implementation [3, 215-237; 8].

The military dimension constituted a core element of provincial governance. Provincial forces were led by trusted commanders, often bearing titles equivalent to amir sipahsalar, while subordinate officers managed local security. The Seljuk army combined several components, including military slaves (ghulams), troops maintained by iqta holders, contingents supplied by vassal rulers, and Turkmen tribal forces. This structure reflected the broader military-feudal character of the Seljuk state [6; 10]. Below the governor, local administrators—often drawn from established notable families—managed urban and district affairs. These officials oversaw taxation, public order, and municipal matters, functioning as intermediaries between central authority and local society [5, 130]. The iqta system played a pivotal role in sustaining this order by allocating state revenues to military and administrative elites in return for service. However, these grants were conditional rather than hereditary, reinforcing the sultan's ultimate control over land and authority. Overall, Azerbaijan's provincial administration exemplified the integration of centralized Seljuk institutions with regional political realities.

Conclusion. An analysis of Turkish historiography shows that before the Seljuk expansion, Azerbaijan's political order functioned within an administrative framework largely shaped by the legacy of the Arab Caliphate. Governance reflected Islamic political and legal traditions, particularly in taxation, judicial organization, and provincial administration, although regional conditions influenced their practical implementation. The incorporation of Azerbaijan into the Seljuk Empire brought a substantial transformation in political and administrative structures. Turkish historians emphasize that the Seljuks introduced a more centralized and militarily oriented system, reorganizing Azerbaijan as a province integrated into a broader imperial framework. Authority was exercised through governors appointed by the sultan, while the iqta-based system linked fiscal resources to military service, strengthening central control. This transformation is interpreted as a synthesis of pre-Islamic Turkic concepts of sovereignty with Islamic administrative institutions. As a result, the Seljuk period represents a formative stage in the institutional development of political authority and state organization in the South Caucasus.

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SƏLCUQLAR DÖVRÜNDƏ AZƏRBAYCANIN SİYASİ SİSTEMİ VƏ İDARƏÇİLİYİ TÜRKİYƏ TARİXŞÜNASLIĞINDA

Bu məqalə Səlcuqlar dövründə Azərbaycanın siyasi sistemi və idarəçilik modelinin Türkiyə tarixşünaslığında necə konseptuallaşdırıldığını təhlil edir. XI–XII əsrlərdə Böyük Səlcuq dövlətinin Cənubi Qafqazda təşəkkül tapması ilə Azərbaycanın siyasi-strateji, iqtisadi və idarəçilik strukturları yeni imperiya çərçivəsində yenidən formalaşdırıldı. Tədqiqatın əsas məqsədi Türkiyə tarixçilərinin əsərlərində Azərbaycanın Səlcuq dövlət mexanizminin tərkib hissəsi kimi necə təqdim edildiyini, mərkəz–idarə münasibətlərinin hansı nəzəri çərçivədə izah olunduğunu və regional idarəçilik praktikasının hansı institusional əsaslara söykəndiyini müəyyən etməkdir. Məqalədə Türkiyə tarixşünaslığının aparıcı nümayəndələrinin iqtə sistemi, hərbi-feodal təşkilatlanma, vilayət idarəçiliyi, vergi mexanizmləri və məhkəmə-hüquq strukturlarının fəaliyyəti ilə bağlı yanaşmaları araşdırılır. Eyni zamanda köçəri türk siyasi ənənələri ilə İslam dövlət institutlarının sintezi, sultan hakimiyyətinin legitimlik əsasları və bürokratik aparatın rolu kimi nəzəri cəhətdən mühüm ölçülər təhlil edilir. Tədqiqat həm klassik tədqiqatların şərhini, həm də institusional və müqayisəli-tarixi perspektivlər daxil olmaqla müasir metodoloji yanaşmaları əhatə edir. Türkiyə tarixşünaslığında Azərbaycan Səlcuq imperiyasının yalnız coğrafi periferiyası kimi deyil, siyasi və iqtisadi baxımdan strateji əhəmiyyət daşıyan məkan kimi təqdim olunur. Bu kontekstdə məqalə göstərir ki, Azərbaycanın idarəçilik modeli ümumi sistemin regional təzahürü olmaqla yanaşı, yerli sosial-siyasi reallıqların təsiri altında formalaşmışdır. Nəticə etibarilə, tədqiqat Səlcuqlar dövründə Cənubi Qafqazda dövlət quruculuğunun mahiyyətini daha sistemli və konseptual şəkildə anlamağa imkan verir.

Açar sözlər: Səlcuq İmperiyası, Azərbaycan, siyasi sistem, idarəçilik, Türkiyə tarixşünaslığı, iqtə sistemi, Türko-İslam dövlətçilik ənənəsi, orta əsr dövlət quruculuğu.

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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ СИСТЕМА И УПРАВЛЕНИЕ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА В ЭПОХУ СЕЛЬДЖУКОВ В ТУРЕЦКОЙ ИСТОРИОГРАФИИ

В статье анализируется, каким образом политическая система и модель управления Азербайджана в эпоху Сельджуков концептуализируются в турецкой историографии. С формированием Великого Сельджукского государства на Южном Кавказе в XI–XII веках политико-стратегические, экономические и управленческие структуры Азербайджана были перестроены в рамках новой империи. Основная цель исследования заключается в том, чтобы определить, каким образом в трудах турецких историков Азербайджан представлен как составная часть государственного механизма Сельджуков, в каком теоретическом контексте объясняются отношения центра и управления, а также на каких институциональных основаниях базировалась практика регионального управления. В статье рассматриваются подходы ведущих представителей турецкой историографии к системе икта, военно-феодальной организации, провинциальному управлению, налоговым механизмам и функционированию судебно-правовых структур. Одновременно анализируются такие теоретически важные аспекты, как синтез кочевых тюркских политических традиций и исламских государственных институтов, легитимационные основы власти султана и роль бюрократического аппарата. Исследование включает

как интерпретацию классических исследований, так и современные методологические подходы, в том числе институциональные и сравнительно-исторические перспективы. В турецкой историографии Азербайджан представлен не только как географическая периферия Сельджукской империи, но и как регион, обладающий стратегическим значением в политическом и экономическом отношении. В данном контексте статья показывает, что модель управления Азербайджана формировалась под влиянием местных социально-политических реалий наряду с региональным проявлением общей системы. В результате исследование позволяет более системно и концептуально осмыслить сущность государственного строительства на Южном Кавказе в эпоху Сельджуков.

Ключевые слова: Сельджукская империя, Азербайджан, политическая система, государственное управление, турецкая историография, система икта, тюрко-исламская государственная традиция, средневековое государственное строительство.

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