

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

**THE MILITARY ORGANIZATION OF THE AQ
QOYUNLU STATE: AN EVALUATION IN TERMS OF
HUMAN RESOURCES AND BATTLE ORDER**

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Abstract: This article evaluates the military structure of the Aq Qoyunlu state, focusing on human resources, unit organization, and battle formations. The analysis is divided into two parts: the first examines human resources, including specialized and provincial forces, with attention to demographic and ethnic factors. The second part explores the battle order of the Aq Qoyunlu army, analyzing key components such as the vanguard, center, flanks, and special-purpose units, particularly guard units. The article also reviews various battles involving the Aq Qoyunlu within this framework, using primary sources and incorporating the findings of scholars who have researched the state's military history. By examining these elements, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contributed to the military effectiveness of the Aq Qoyunlu. Ultimately, the goal is to assess the role and effectiveness of human resources in military operations and their impact on the outcomes of battles.

Key Words: Aq Qoyunlu State, Human Element, Battle Order, Hassa Units, Garavul Units

**AKKOYUNLU DEVLETİ'NİN ASKERİ TEŞKİLATI:
İNSAN KAYNAĞI VE SAVAŞ DÜZENİ BAKIMINDAN
DEĞERLENDİRME**

Öz: Makale, Akkoyunlu Devleti'nin askeri yapısını, insan kaynağı, birliklerin organizasyonu ve savaş düzenleri açısından değerlendirmektedir. Analiz iki bölümden oluşmaktadır: İlk bölüm, demografik ve etnik unsurlara dikkat çekerek, uzmanlaşmış ve eyalet kuvvetleri dâhil olmak üzere insan kaynağını ele alır. İkinci bölüm ise, Akkoyunlu ordusunun savaş düzenini inceleyerek, öncü birlikler,

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merkez, kanatlar ve özellikle muhafız birlikleri gibi özel amaçlı birlikleri analiz eder. Makale, bu çerçevede Akkoyunlu Devleti'nin katıldığı çeşitli savaşları da gözden geçirir ve birincil kaynaklar ile bu kaynaklara dayalı araştırma yapan bilim insanlarının bulgularından yararlanır. Bu unsurları inceleyerek, çalışma Akkoyunlu'nun askeri etkinliğine katkıda bulunan faktörlerin kapsamlı bir anlayışını sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Nihai hedef, insan kaynağının askeri operasyonlardaki rolünü ve etkinliğini, ayrıca savaşların sonuçları üzerindeki etkisini değerlendirmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akkoyunlu Devleti, İnsan Unsuru, Savaş Düzeni, Hassa Kuvvetleri, Karavul Birlikleri.

Introduction

The military contingent of the Azerbaijani Aq Qoyunlu state, as a synthesized example of the traditional Turkic-Mongol military organization, reflects important elements derived from the nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle. The utilization of military and administrative organization, particularly shaped by the legacy of the Seljuks and the influence of the empire of Genghis Khan, and its incorporation into the state structures of the Ilkhanids, Timurids, Jalairids, Qara Qoyunlu, and Aq Qoyunlu, reflects the continuity of a synthesized governance tradition-namely, the Turkic-Mongol organizational tradition. This system, characterized by the dominance of nomadic military elites in state and military administration, the use of light cavalry archers, rapid mobility, and high maneuverability in military organization, as well as a well-structured military hierarchy, represented a distinct and specialized form of governance. This tradition had a profound impact on the Aq Qoyunlu state, shaping its military and administrative frameworks significantly. Particularly, the Ilkhanids and the Timurids played a crucial role in the dissemination of these traditions, and the organizational structure of the Aq Qoyunlu was shaped directly under the influence of these two states.

A significant portion of the contingent was composed of semi-nomadic Turkmen tribes, which, being the founding element of the state, provide us with crucial information regarding the human component of military organization. The evaluation of the human element that constituted the Aq Qoyunlu army should be conducted in two phases: the first phase encompasses the period up to 1469, which includes the tribal confederation and the early years of the state; the second phase covers the period following the full expulsion of the Timurids from Azerbaijani, Iranian, and Iraqi territories, after which the Aq Qoyunlu established complete sovereignty over these regions.

In the process of evaluating the human component, another significant aspect

is the ethnic identity of these military units, their numerical strength, and other technical characteristics. Although the combat organization of the Aq Qoyunlu army also plays a crucial role in the assessment of its human element, this field represents an independent subject of research in its own right.

1. Hassa¹ Units

The term expressed as “hassa” in Turkic literature and as “xassə” in Azerbaijani literature is a form of the Arabic word “khas,” which conveys the meaning of belonging to something or someone.² In historical sources, phrases such as “nökeran-i-hasse”³, “ordu-yi-hasse”⁴, and “boyi-nökeran”⁵ are used to refer to forces that, distinct from state or confederation armies, were under the direct command of a ruler or sovereign, representing their personal troops.⁶

These forces can be categorized into two groups based on their organization and designation. Within the hassa units there were combatants maintained explicitly for military purposes, who participated only in battles in which their lord personally took part or in engagements carried out under his direct command. Among the non-military forces, there were various palace and army servants who, like the combatants, were exclusively tied to the lord they served.

The hassa units under the direct authority of the ruler, particularly in the Aq Qoyunlu army, consisted of its most elite warriors, forming the core of the military's combat strength. By the 1470s, these personal forces of the ruler, which constituted the second-largest group in the army after the provincial forces, ranged between 25,000 and 30,000 soldiers. This estimate is supported by Venetian traveler Josaphat Barbaro, who recorded these figures

¹ خاصه (khasse)

² Abdulkadir Özcan, “Hassa”, TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, Volume 16, İstanbul 1997, p.394.

³ نوکران خاصه (personal servants), Abû Bakr-i Tihri, Kitâb-i Diyârbakriyya: Ak-Koyunlular tarihi, Volume 1, 2nd edition, Edited by N. Lugal and F. Sümer, with introduction and notes by F. Sümer, Publications of the Turkish Historical Society (AKDITYK TTK), Series III, No. 7(1). TTK Printing House, Ankara 1993a; p. 65; turkish translate: Ebu Bekr-i Tihri, Kitabi Diyârbakriyye, translate Mürsel Öztürk, 1st ed., TTK, Ankara 2014, p.54.

⁴ باردوی خاصه (personal army), Tihri, 1993a, p.182; tr. Tihri, 2014, p.125.

⁵ بوی نوکران (clan servants), Devvani, Arzname, Millî Tettebbûlar Mecmuası, II/5, tsh. Kilisli Rifat, İstanbul 1331 (a.d. 1913) p. 302; İlgar Baharlı. “Arznâme” ve “Hulâsatü't-tevârîh” Eserlerinde Akkoyunlu ve Safevi Ordularının Resmigeçitleri (Çeviri-Tıpkıbasım-İnceleme). Paradigma Akademi Yayınları, Çanakkale 2023, p.65.

⁶ John E. Woods, Akkoyunlular: Aşiret, Konfederasyon, İmparatorluk, translated S.Özbudun, İstanbul Milliyet Yayınları, 1993, 1st ed.

during a military review conducted by Uzun Hasan near Shiraz. According to Barbaro's writings, within Uzun Hasan's hassa units, there were 15,000 sword-bearing cavalry, 1,000 archers, and 25,000 elite cavalry, as well as 3,000 infantry equipped with spears and bows. Of the 25,000 cavalry, 1,000 were armed with spears, 5,000 with shields, and approximately 10,000 were archers.⁷ Another Venetian traveler, Contarini, who was also present at the same event, emphasized based on information from Barbaro and others, that the number of mounted soldiers serving Uzun Hasan exceeded 25,000. He noted that these units were armed with bows, arrows, swords, and shields adorned with silk, and they wore metal helmets and armor.⁸

Mario Angiolello, another Venetian present with the Ottoman troops during the Battle of Otlugbeli, also likely referred to this review when he mentioned that Uzun Hasan had 25,000 infantry soldiers.⁹ Angiolello further wrote that in May, Uzun Hasan had moved with his army to the highlands, where they found abundant pastures. The idea that both Barbaro and Angiolello were describing the same event is reinforced by Barbaro's reference to being with Uzun Hasan at that time. Despite the similarities in the numbers reported, the specific groups or units they refer to differ. For instance, as it is well known, the majority of the Aq Qoyunlu army was composed of cavalry. Therefore, Angiolello's claim of a 25,000-strong infantry force appears unlikely. When cross-referenced with the other two authors, it can be reasonably concluded that this number actually refers to the cavalry of Uzun Hasan's hassa units.

As previously discussed, the hassa forces were not only under the command of the ruler but could also be found under the authority of various emirs, particularly the princes. This tradition had been established since the early periods of the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty. For instance, during the battle between Amir Chekum and Qara Osman in April 1407, Qara Osman's son, Ibrahim Bey is recorded as being a member of a "nökeran-i-hasse"¹⁰ of 30 men.¹¹ Another example can be found in the "Arznama," a report written by

⁷ Josephat Barbaro, *Anadoluya və İrana seyahat*, çev. Tufan Gündüz, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul 2022, 5th ed.

⁸ Uzun Hasan ve Fatih mücadelesi döneminde Doğu'da Venedik elçileri : Caterino Zeno ve Ambrogio Contarini'nin seyahatnâmeleri, translate and notes Tufan Gündüz, Yeditepe Yayınevi, İstanbul 2021, 5th ed.

⁹ *A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*. Edited by Edward Granville Browne. Hakluyt Society, London 1873.

¹⁰ Tihrani, 1993a, p. 64

¹¹ Tihrani, 2014, p. 53; Həsən bəy Rumlu, *Əhsənüt-təvərix (Tarixlərin ən yaxşısı)*, translated by Öktay Efendiyev and Namiq Musalı, Uzanlar, Kastamonu 2017, p.52.

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Mawlana Jalal al-Din Davani, detailing a review that took place in the Bendi-Mir region, organized by Prince Sultan Khalil, the governor of the Fars province. The text describes the procession of Fars' military forces and palace dignitaries. On the second day of the review, at the prince's request, the *hassa* forces¹² also took part. Among the forces recorded were 810 “*pushandar*”¹³, 188 “*tirkeshband*”¹⁴, and, along with the “*yasavuls*”¹⁵, 378 “*piyade*”.¹⁶

Other components of the personal forces were non-military units, responsible for the logistics, provisioning, and maintenance of weapons, as well as addressing various operational needs both during and outside of wartime. In this context, the travel account of J. Barbaro and Davani's "Arznama" provide valuable insights. J. Barbaro notes that among Uzun Hasan's non-military personal forces were tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, saddle-makers, arrow-makers, and merchants selling various goods. It is, of course, uncertain whether all of these individuals, particularly the merchants, were formally part of the personal forces. However, it is clear that the palace dignitaries and those employed within the palace structure were under the direct control of the ruler rather than the state, thus forming part of the *hassa* forces.¹⁷

In the “Arznama”, we can find a detailed list of non-military units within Prince Sultan Khalil's *hassa* units, including both their names and numbers. The text provides the following figures: 244 “*bukavul*”¹⁸, 86 “*kushchi*”¹⁹, 28

¹² is written as *boy-i nökeran* (بوی نوکران) in the original Persian text, Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

¹³ پوشن دار (heavy armored cavalry), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302; for more information: Nəriman Şirəliyev, Azərbaycan Ağqoyunlu dövlətində ağır zirehli süvarilər: puşandarlar, Hərbi Bilik, №1, 2024, pp.94-102.

¹⁴ ترکش بند (mounted archers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

¹⁵ یساولان (military inspector or military police), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302; for more information: Nəriman Şirəliyev, Azərbaycan Ağqoyunlu dövlətində hərbi vəzifəlilər, Sosial Elmlər, №1, 2024, pp.86-103.

¹⁶ پیادگان (infantry soldiers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302; Baharlu, a.g.e., p.65.

¹⁷ Woods, a.g.e., p.20.

¹⁸ بکاولان Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302; There is a disagreement among researchers. For some, it refers to a kitchen officer, while for others, it refers to a special duty officer; for more information: Şirəliyev, Hərbi Vəzifəlilər

¹⁹ قوشچیان (falconers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

“parschi”²⁰, 184 “azeb”²¹, 50 “naqqarachi”²², 34 “rikabdar”²³, 37 “yamchi”²⁴, 26 “mesheldar”²⁵, 28 “fuyuc”²⁶, 72 “amele-yi metbekh-i humayun”²⁷, 110 “farrashes”²⁸, 168 stable workers²⁹, 46 shepherds and camel handlers³⁰, 58 staff from the royal library (“Kitabhana-i-Humayun”)³¹, 98 “ehl-i tarab”³², 56 “carchi”³³ and “khorokchu”³⁴, 86 “sanna”³⁵, and 36 “ayaqchi”³⁶.

The semi-nomadic Aq Qoyunlu tribes, as part of their lifestyle, would migrate with all their possessions. The hassa forces also operated in this manner, functioning as a self-sufficient community. J. Barbaro provides additional figures for these retinues: 30,000 camels, 5,000 pack horses, 2,000 donkeys, 20,000 horse caretakers, 5,000 mules, and 2,000 high-quality mules, along with 20,000 small livestock, 2,000 cattle, 100 hunting leopards, 200 falcons, 3,000 greyhounds, 1,000 hunting dogs, and 50 golden pheasants. He also notes that there were 10,000 women from the upper and middle classes, 5,000 female servants, 6,000 boys and girls aged six to twelve, and approximately 5,000 children around five years old. The entire caravan consisted of 6,000 tents.³⁷ These figures not only disprove the notion that the hassa units were maintained solely for military purposes but also highlight their role as a comprehensive and unique social system.

The hassa forces were engaged in various tasks, such as protecting the emir under whose authority they served, participating in battles alongside him,

²⁰ پارسچين (panther keepers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²¹ عزبن (irregular infantry), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²² نقره مين (musicians), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²³ ركبدارا (stirrup holders), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²⁴ يامچين (postmen), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²⁵ مشعل دار (torchbearers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²⁶ فيوج (runners), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²⁷ عملی مطبخ همايون (kitchen staff), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²⁸ فراشان Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

²⁹ ملازمان طواجر (mulazeman-e tavaher or mulazimet-ul ahur) Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

³⁰ شيربانان و شيربانان (shabānān va shīrbānān) Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

³¹ كتبخاني همايون Devvani, a.g.e., p. 302

³² اهل طرب (entertainers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 303

³³ جارچين (announcers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 303

³⁴ فرقچين (chorister), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 303

³⁵ صناع (artificers), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 303

³⁶ ايا قحيانه (cup bearer, wine dispenser), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 303

³⁷ Barbaro, a.g.e., p.71-72.

and providing various services in the palace or during campaigns. In the Timurid state, the leaders of these groups were often placed in command of provincial troops.³⁸ Many of Genghis Khan's commanders also rose from the ranks of his personal retinue.³⁹ The key factor in such systems was gaining the ruler's trust, and those who earned it rose above others. John Woods points out that the Aq Qoyunlu also had such a distinction within their hassa forces, with this elite group being involved in consultation meetings alongside the ruler's closest advisors.⁴⁰ İlhan Erdem identifies this elite group with the "inaq," a class of individuals chosen from among the personal retainers to serve the sultan.⁴¹ The existence of such a group within the hassa forces underscores their significant position in the court.

The regular organization of these forces is also emphasized in sources concerning the empire of Genghis Khan, another example of the importance of hassa forces in state systems. Along with military and non-military units, a thousand soldiers were assigned as the direct personal guard of the khan and functioned as his central unit in battle. Interestingly, these forces only joined battles when the khan himself participated.⁴² In contrast, within the Aq Qoyunlu, the ruler's hassa forces could join campaigns under his command, even in his absence. For example, Abu Bakr Tehrani asserts that Uzun Hasan dispatched Shahzade Ugurlu Muhammad, accompanied by 10,000 men from his own "nökeran-i khasse" and several commanders, on a campaign against Jahan Shah's sons, Hasan Ali and Amir Yusuf.⁴³

There are various perspectives regarding the ethnic composition of hassa forces. For instance, Genghis Khan's personal units were comprised of Mongol aristocrats and were regarded as his most trusted forces.⁴⁴ In contrast, the Ghaznavid "ghulam-i khas" units included not only Turks but also representatives of other ethnicities.⁴⁵ Similarly, in the Seljuk state, these forces were composed of both local soldiers and captured individuals who

³⁸ Ensar Macit, *Timurlu Devletinin Askeri Teşkilatı* (master thesis), University of Ataturk, Erzurum 2012, p.8.

³⁹ Abdulkadir Özcan, "Hassa Ordusu", TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, 2st ed., Ankara 2020

⁴⁰ Woods, a.g.e., p.20.

⁴¹ Erdem, İlhan. "Akkoyunlu Ordusunu Oluşturan İnsan Unsuru". *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 15, sy.26 (Mayıs 1991): 85-92.

⁴² Mustafa Uyar, *İlhanlı Devletinin Askeri Teşkilatı* (doc. thesis), University of Ankara, Ankara 2007.

⁴³ Tihrani, 2014, p. 334.

⁴⁴ Uyar, a.g.e.

⁴⁵ Özcan, *Hassa Ordusu*, p.542.

were subsequently militarized, becoming the backbone of the army.⁴⁶ In the Aq Qoyunlu state, however, these units were entirely made up of Turkmen. Minorsky, while commenting on the “Arznama”, emphasized that these forces were undoubtedly Turkmen.⁴⁷ The frequent use of the term “boy-nöker” in many sources further supports this idea. The primary objective was to make these units highly professional and trustworthy. Moreover, no sources mention the recruitment or calling up of the hassa forces into the army, which further confirms their permanence and suggests they were specially trained military units.⁴⁸

A key issue debated among scholars concerns the distinction between “qorchu”⁴⁹ and “khasse nöker” forces. The term “qorchu” refers to forces specifically tasked with the ruler's personal protection. Oktay Efendiyev writes: “The units responsible for the personal protection of Aq Qoyunlu and Qara Qoyunlu sultans, separate from the regular personal soldiers, were called “nökerani-khasse”.”⁵⁰ The author notes that in the works of Ruzbihan Khunji and Abu Bakr Tehrani, there is no mention of “qorchu” or a similar term used for the sultan’s protection. This indicates that Efendiyev uses the term “khasse” in two senses-first, for soldiers meant specifically for combat, and second, for soldiers organized solely for the sultan's personal protection. Efendiyev presents Sultan Khalil’s “khasse nöker” as his personal guards. However, given the numbers and the composition of these forces, it seems unlikely that they were solely for defense purposes. The recorded units include “bukavul”, “yamchi”, mule handlers, chamberlains, and other positions meant for palace service. Therefore, Efendiyev’s view can only be accepted in the context of personal soldiers providing protection without distinguishing different types of forces. While these forces did organize the ruler’s defense, no distinct terminology for defense units appears in the sources. Thus, using “nökerani-khasse” as a synonym for the ruler’s defense force or “qorchu” is not entirely accurate for the Aq Qoyunlu.

J. Barbaro mentions that among Uzun Hasan’s hassa forces, certain capable and deserving men were tasked with serving the ruler and organizing his

⁴⁶ Özcan, Hassa Ordusu

⁴⁷ Minorsky, V. “A Civil and Military Review in Färs in 881/1476.” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10, no. 1 (1940): 141–78.

⁴⁸ Агаев Юсиф, Ахмедов Сабухи, Ак-Кююнлу - Османская война (1472-1473 годы), Elm, Baku 2006.

⁴⁹ The Shah's special guards

⁵⁰ Efendiyev, Oktay. “Karakoyunlu, Akkoyunlu Ve Safevî Devletlerindeki Mülkî Ve Askerî Teşkilâta Bakış” *Yeni Türkiye*, 2002.

defense.⁵¹ This suggests that the hassa forces were responsible for both defense and service without any specific divisions or separate terminology. Sabuhi Ahmadov, on the other hand, argues that there was indeed a distinction between “qorchu” and “khasse nöker”. He notes that there was always a permanent group of 2,500 “qorchu” soldiers responsible for the ruler’s defense. For “boy nöker”. Ahmadov uses the term “state guards,” stating that they were deployed to different provinces and formed the core of local military forces.⁵² This perspective, which presents hassa forces as the main support in the provinces, however, does not align with the composition of the personal retainers recorded during ceremonial processions. Once again, the presence of a servant class within these units, which is not separated from the personal forces, reinforces the notion that these forces did not serve as the state’s military backbone but rather functioned entirely as the personal property of the ruler. This, in turn, confirms that the hassa forces represented a comprehensive system.

The ruler's hassa forces constituted the core of the Aq Qoyunlu army. When C. Davani describes the army of the Fars province, he mentions the forces participating in the procession, referring to the right wing, left wing, and vanguard (mangalay), but does not specifically name the central forces. This absence implies that the ruler or the commanding emir was always in charge of the center, with the forces in the center being the hassa units directly under his authority.

Hasan Beg Rumlu, in his account of the Otlugbeli battle, notes that Uzun Hasan positioned himself in the center with units composed of “fearless Turkmens and formidable Turks”.⁵³ This allows us to draw two key conclusions. First, it clearly illustrates that the ruler positioned himself at the center of the formation. Second, the reference to the ruler’s forces being composed of Turkmens and Turks clarifies the ethnic identity of the hassa forces, showing that they primarily consisted of these groups.

2. Provincial Forces

In the military organization of the Azerbaijani Aq Qoyunlu state, the most numerous forces were formed primarily from provincial troops. Particularly during the imperial period, the need for a larger military presence necessitated the significant role of these provincial forces in the army's structure. The Aq Qoyunlu provincial forces can be assessed in two main categories: the first includes troops led by title-holding emirs who

⁵¹ Barbaro, a.g.e., p.70.

⁵² Агаев Юсиф, Ахмедов Сабухи, a.g.e., p.11.

⁵³ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.287.

contributed to the army, while the second comprises the semi-nomadic Turkmen tribes.⁵⁴

Following the defeat of Cahan Shah and Abu Said, the Aq Qoyunlu, who became the rulers of all of Iran, began to strengthen their authority in these territories by employing a provincial state system. The “*tiyul*”, a land ownership granted in exchange for service, serves as a notable example of Turkmen organization. Naturally, similar forms of land ownership had existed prior to this period. However, the “*tiyul*” system, during the Qaragoyunlu era, was particularly associated with military service. In the “*Kitab-i-Diyarbakriye*”, those who held “*tiyul*” are referred to as “*tiyuldar*”⁵⁵ furthermore, this work notes their participation in military campaigns alongside Cahan Shah. Minorski presents the “*tiyul*” as the right to collect taxes in a specific area.⁵⁶ This form of land ownership, which is also part of the Timurid military system, imposed special responsibilities on its holders to provide manpower to the army when necessary.⁵⁷

The temporary nature of this land ownership, as well as its non-hereditary status, minimized the likelihood of rebellion or defection from the title-holding emir or official. The temporary nature of this land ownership and its non-hereditary status minimized the likelihood of rebellion by the title-holding emirs.

As noted earlier, the expansion of the Aq Qoyunlu state over time necessitated the formation of larger armies, leading to the mobilization of military forces from the provinces and the establishment of organized military units within these regions. The provincial forces evolved into a smaller prototype of the main army.⁵⁸ Each force was composed of blocks categorized as the right wing, left wing, center, and vanguard, with each block consisting of troops led by emirs and various knightly units possessing distinct military capabilities.

In the right wing of the Fars provincial army, Prince Sultan Khalil's son, Ali

⁵⁴ Агаев Юсиф, Ахмедов Сабухи, а.г.е., p.12.

⁵⁵ توپلداران Abū Bakr-i Tihriñî, *Kitâb-i Diyârbakriyya: Ak-Koyunlular tarihi*, Volume 2, 2nd edition, Edited by N. Lugal and F. Sümer, with introduction and notes by F. Sümer, Publications of the Turkish Historical Society (AKDÜYK TTK), Series III, No. 7(a1). TTK Printing House, Ankara 1993, p. 371; tr: p. 242

⁵⁶ Osman Gazi Özgüdenli, “*Tiyûl*”, TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 41, İstanbul 2012.

⁵⁷ Macit, а.г.е., p.113.

⁵⁸ Kazım Paydaş, *Ak-Koyunlu Devlet Teşkilatı* (doc. thesis), University of Ankara, Ankara 2003, p.295.

Mirza, served as the commander.⁵⁹ The primary emirs commanding troops in the right wing included: Amir-i-Azam Muzaffar al-Din Mansur Beg Purnak, Amir-i-Azam Mansur Suhrab Beg, Amir Nur Ali Beg, Sultan Ahmad Beg Julan, Seydi Ali Beg, and Shah Ali Beg Purnak. In total, the right wing⁶⁰ comprised 2,392 “pushandar”, 3,752 “tirkeshbend”, and 3,900 “galighchi”⁶¹.⁶² The left wing was led by Amir-i-Azam Mahmud Beg, and its commanding emirs included Amir Hussein Beg Bayındır, Amir-i-Azam Ababakir Beg, Amir Bahlul Beg, Amir Seyyid Qasim Beg, Ali Beg Aghmalu, and Amir-i-Azam Shahqulu Beg Ayn-ul-Mulk. The left wing consisted of 1,931 “pushandar”, 3,721 “tirkeshbend”, and 1,718 service personnel.⁶³

The “asakir-i mangalay”⁶⁴ of the Fars province were under the command of Sultan Nureddin Elvend Mirza, with significant emirs such as Amir Mansur Beg Afshar, Amir Suhrab Beg, Amir Ahmad Beg, and Pir Mihmad commanding the mangalay. The mangalay comprised 932 “pushandar”, 3,014 “tirkeshbend”, and 1,716 service personnel.⁶⁵ The provincial governor led the central forces with his own personal troops. The governor of Fars, Prince Sultan Khalil, commanded 810 “pushandar”, 188 “tirkeshbend”, and 378 infantry personnel.⁶⁶

It is essential to note that Fars province was merely one of several provinces within the Aq Qoyunlu state. It is believed that there were at least ten provinces in total.⁶⁷ For instance, we can reference Sultan Yaqub's 1483 campaign in Georgia, during which he directed the armies of Diyarbakir and Azerbaijan towards Akhaltsikhe.⁶⁸ From this example, it is reasonable to consider both Azerbaijan and Diyarbakir as significant provinces with their

⁵⁹ Baharlu, a.g.e., p.51.

⁶⁰ اصحاب اليمين (the term “Ashab al-Yamin” is commonly translated as “the companions of the right” or “those on the right-hand side), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 295

⁶¹ قلغچى (“gullugchu?” service personel), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 295

⁶² Devvani, a.g.e., p. 295; Baharlu, a.g.e., p.53-55.

⁶³ Baharlu, a.g.e., p.53-58.

⁶⁴ عسکر منقلای (vanguard troop soldier), Devvani, a.g.e., p. 297

⁶⁵ Baharlu, a.g.e., p.58-60.

⁶⁶ Baharlu, a.g.e., p.60.

⁶⁷ Erdem, a.g.e., p.91.

⁶⁸ Fadlullah b. Ruzbihan Khunji-İsfahani, *Tarikh-i Alam-ara-yi Amini*, translated V.Minorsky, additions and comments J.Woods, Royal Asiatic Society, London 1992; Kazım Paydaş, *Ak-Koyunlu Türkmen Hükümdarı Sultan Yakub ve Dönemi (1478-1490): Siyasi Tarih, Sanat, Şair ve Âlimler*, Bilge Kültür Sanat, İstanbul 2023.

own military forces.

Before the Battle of Otlugbeli, Katerino Zeno provided insights into the Aq Qoyunlu army, noting the presence of various ethnic groups, including Iranians, Georgians, Kurds, and Tatars, within its ranks.⁶⁹ Similarly, Angiolello referenced a diverse composition of the forces, mentioning the inclusion of Parthians, Khorasanis, Arranlis, Georgians, and Tatars.⁷⁰

The reported numbers for the Aq Qoyunlu army at the time of the Otlugbeli battle vary significantly, ranging from 40,000 to 300,000. According to Hasan Bey Rumlu, it is possible to estimate a strength of around 70,000 troops.⁷¹ If we consider that approximately 20,000 to 25,000 of these forces were made up of the Shah's hassa troops, we can infer that the remaining 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers were primarily provincial forces.

Furthermore, Hasan Beg Rumlu notes that prior to the battle, Uzun Hasan positioned himself in the center alongside Turkish and Turkoman troops.⁷² He does not provide similar information regarding other battle blocks. This suggests that the overall structure of the Aq Qoyunlu army during the battle formation included provincial forces and representatives from various ethnic groups, strategically placed in different blocks-specifically, the right and left wings of the army.

3. Battle Formation

The military units of the Azerbaijan Aq Qoyunlu state were structured into combat divisions, which included the right flank, left flank, center, vanguard units, and reconnaissance units. Additionally, reconnaissance units were formed when necessary prior to battles. This organizational structure exemplifies the continuation of the medieval Turkic-Mongol military tradition known as the "five-unit system" or "tabiye." It was adapted to align with the lifestyle of the Aq Qoyunlu and also reflects the tribal unity of the nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, along with the customs arising from their way of life.

3.1. Mangalay⁷³ or Mugaddime⁷⁴ Units

The main assault force of the Aq Qoyunlu army was composed of the vanguard units known as the mangalay. The effectiveness of the mangalay's

⁶⁹ Doğu'da Venedik elçileri, a.g.e., p.29.

⁷⁰ A Narrative of Italian Travels, a.g.e., p.86; Doğu'da Venedik elçileri, a.g.e., p.25.

⁷¹ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.285.

⁷² Rumlu, a.g.e., p.251.

⁷³ منقلاى Tihrani, 1993a, p.147; tr: p. 103

⁷⁴ مقدمه Tihrani, 1993a, p. 183; tr: p. 123

attacks significantly influenced the outcome of battles.⁷⁵ These units moved several kilometers ahead of the main army caravan, specializing in military tactics that prevented the enemy from directly harming the overall army and, when necessary, launched unexpected and rapid attacks against the adversary. According to the accounts of Ibn Iyās, in January 1435, while Qara Yuluq Osman Bey was in Urfa, his vanguard units had reached Malatya.⁷⁶ During Sultan Hamza campaign to Erzincan in 1438, the mangalay unit of the army engaged in battle with a mangalay unit organized by Bahtiyar Akan, positioned one farsakh away from the main military force.⁷⁷

In the continuing days of the same battle, during the siege of Erzincan Fortress by Sultan Hamza, Cafer Beg commanded the center of the Aq Qoyunlu troops, while Cahangir Beg led the mangalay of the main army, with Uzun Hasan directing the mangalay forces of Cahangir Beg. The units under Uzun Hasan infiltrated behind Sultan Hamza's army and attacked and looted the area where his possessions were located before anyone else.⁷⁸ In 1468, during Uzun Hasan's campaign to Iraq and Fars provinces, the mangalay leading the army moving toward Isfahan was entrusted to Prince Ughurlu Muhammed, and these units moved five positions ahead of the main army.⁷⁹ In the year 886 AH (1481-1482 AD), during Sultan Yaqub's expedition against Bayındır Beg's rebellion, the mangalay units were led by Sharaf al-Din Osman Beg Miranshahi. Osman Beg attacked Bayındır Beg's forces more swiftly than the main army and achieved success.⁸⁰

The military strategy of the army and its adaptability to various military operations, such as launching surprise attacks on the enemy and executing tactical withdrawals, were significantly influenced by the mangalay units. The number of these units varied, taking into account the overall strength of the army. During Sultan Hamza's siege of the Urfa fortress, the mangalay

⁷⁵ Şahin Fərzəliyev, *Azərbaycan XV-XVI əsrlərdə*, Elm, Bakı 1983.

⁷⁶ Tulay Koyuncuoğlu, İbn İyas'ın "Bedai' Ez-Zuhur Fi Vekai' Ed-Dühur" adlı eserindeki Ramazanoğulları Beyliği ve Akkoyunlular ile ilgili kayıtlar (master thesis), University of Ege, İzmir 2004.

⁷⁷ Tihrani, 2014, p.103; Muhsin Behramnejad, *Karakoyunlular Akkoyunlular*, translated and notes Serdar Gündoğdu, Ali İçer, Kronik, İstanbul 2022. 3rd ed.

⁷⁸ Tihrani, 2014, p.104.

⁷⁹ Tihrani, 2014, p.343; Behramnejad, a.g.e., p.107; Kadı Ahmed Gaffari, *Tarih-i Cihan-Ara. Osmanlılar, Karakoyunlular, Akkoyunlular, Safeviler*, translate and notes Buket Gündüz, Bilge Kültür-Sanat, İstanbul 2023

⁸⁰ Rumlu, a.g.e., p. 317; Khunji, a.g.e., p.42.

unit consisted of 1,000 personnel.⁸¹ Subsequently, when facing the Mardin army, it was noted that the enemy had organized a mangalay force of 300 soldiers against Uzun Hasan and Cahangir Mirza.⁸² In April 1451, Uzun Hasan had formed a vanguard unit of 20 soldiers against the forces of Qara Qoyunlu Rustem Tarkhan.⁸³ Prior to the battle of Otlugbeli, Uzun Hasan appointed Prince Ughurlu Muhammed to lead a mangalay of 10,000 troops.⁸⁴

More detailed information about the composition of the mangalay unit can be found in the “Arznāme.” The author notes that the mangalay unit in the forces of Fars province consisted of 5,662 personnel, which included 932 “pushandar”, 3,014 “tirkeshbend”, and 1,716 support staff. The mangalay unit was commanded by Prince Sultan Nureddin Alvand Mirza, followed by commanders such as Amir Mansur Bey Afshar, Amir Suhrab Bey, Amir Ahmad Bey, and Pir Mehmed.⁸⁵

As evident, the numbers varied between 20 and 10,000, suggesting that the mangalay unit was organized in anticipation of the upcoming battle, with the troops assigned specific duties. Thus, it can be inferred that these units were organized through the strategic appointments made by the ruler, considering the current circumstances of the battle and the enemy.

Particularly, by freeing these units from additional loads, their speed was significantly enhanced, and light-armed archery units were extensively utilized in the military organization of the army. In the context of the Aq Qoyunlu military organization, mangalay units were employed in nearly all military operations. They were designated for both small-scale battles and larger troop engagements. There are two significant battles that should be examined for the study of the military strategy of the mangalay units. The first occurred in early August 1473, prior to the battle of Otlugbeli, at the banks of the Euphrates River, where the Aq Qoyunlu mangalay led by Prince Ughurlu Muhammed faced the Ottoman forces commanded by Khas Murad Pasha. As noted earlier, the 10,000-strong Aq Qoyunlu mangalay is recorded in various sources as the largest contingent for this unit.

The troops under Prince Ughurlu Muhammed frequently displayed their colors to provoke the Ottoman forces into attacks, subsequently retreating to set ambushes. Following Khas Murad Pasha's assault, the Aq Qoyunlu

⁸¹ Tihrani, 2014, p.109.

⁸² Tihrani, 2014, p.111.

⁸³ Tihrani, 2014, p.126

⁸⁴ Rumlu, a.g.e., 285; Tihrani, 2014, 373

⁸⁵ Baharlu, a.g.e., p. 60

mangalay, stationed along the Euphrates River, succeeded in killing 4,000 enemy soldiers along with several commanders, including Khas Murad Pasha himself.⁸⁶ The Italian traveler Mario Angiolello noted that, by the end of the battle, there were 12,000 fewer Ottoman troops.⁸⁷ According to the traveler's accounts, the Aq Qoyunlu forces maintained proximity to the shore, hindering the approach of Ottoman troops with archery fire, which resulted in the drowning of many soldiers. Additionally, those who reached the shore engaged in combat within the river, benefiting from their close proximity to the shoreline, which allowed them to receive support and retreat effectively.⁸⁸

Another significant battle concerning the military strategies of the Aq Qoyunlu mangalay units took place on June 15, 1478, between Sultan Khalil and Yaqub Mirza. The mangalay units of Sultan Yaqub were led by commanders such as Omer Beg Cakirli, Mensur Beg Ceceni, Yusif Beg, Khurshid Beg, and Cemshid Beg's sons. On the other hand, Sultan Khalil's mangalay units comprised the forces of Sharaf al-Din Osman Beg Miranshahi, Shah Ali Beg Purnak, and Sufi Khalil Beg. During the battle, Sultan Khalil's mangalay units attacked Yaqub's "charkhachi"⁸⁹ forces and drove them back to the "muchi"⁹⁰ units. During the course of the battle, Osman Beg Miranshahi, the commander of Sultan Khalil's mangalay units, captured the family of Bayandır Beg, who was positioned on the left flank of Sultan Yaqub's army. Likely believing they had secured victory, they began to retreat. The total defeat of Sultan Yaqub's mangalay units and the right flank of his army led to Sultan Khalil's assault on the center, ultimately resulting in his death in the ensuing chaos.⁹¹ Thus, it is clear that one of the main objectives of the mangalay unit during the battle was to defeat the enemy's vanguard forces and subsequently launch sudden assaults on the enemy's flanks. A noteworthy point regarding the organization of the mangalay units in this battle is the mention of the "charxchi" and "muchi" units. Information about these units is scarce. Within the context of the Aq Qoyunlu army, references to the "charxchi" and "muchi" units appear for the first time in this battle. "Charxchi" units can be equated with the "charhaci" in the Ottoman military organization, which comprised light cavalry in

⁸⁶ Rumlu, a.g.e., 285; Tihrani, 2014, p. 375

⁸⁷ A Narrative of Italian Travels, a.g.e., p. 87

⁸⁸ A Narrative of Italian Travels, a.g.e., p. 87.

⁸⁹ چرخچین Khunji, a.g.e., persian (Farsi) text, p. 158

⁹⁰ مویجی Khunji, a.g.e., persian (Farsi) text, p. 159

⁹¹ Khunji, a.g.e., english text, p.30-32; Paydaş, 2023; Gaffari, a.g.e., p.63; Behramnejad, a.g.e., p.114.

vanguard units. Abdulkadir Özcan identifies these units as synonymous with the Aq Qoyunlu mangalay.⁹² V. Minorski aligns the “charxchi” with light infantry units typical of western armies, such as “skirmishers” and “voltigeurs,” which operated using hit-and-run tactics.⁹³ An additional noteworthy point regarding “charxchis” is the meaning of the term “charx,” which refers to wheel or rotation. This gives rise to the idea that the name of these units stems from their movement and military tactics. The presence of units in numerous armies composed mainly of light cavalry that utilized “recirculation” as a military tactic suggests that this tradition continued in the Aq Qoyunlu military organization through the “charxchis”.⁹⁴

In the battle that occurred on June 20, 1503, between Aq Qoyunlu Sultan Murad and Shah Ismail I Safavid, the “charxci” units were also referred to alongside the mangalay. Once the armies organized their right, left, center, and reserve forces, they appointed a commander for the “charxchis”. This position was entrusted to Khulafa Beg and Mansur Beg Qipchaqli on the Safavid side, and to Islamish Beg on the Aq Qoyunlu side. The Aq Qoyunlu “charxchi”s initiated the battle by attacking the enemy “charxchi”s, pushing them back toward the center.⁹⁵ The fact that the battle was first initiated by the “charxchis”, and that the name mangalay is not mentioned among the battle divisions, suggests that the “charxchi” units and the mangalay could be the same unit. Kazım Paydash, however, presents the muchis as raiding units.⁹⁶ As a result, the similarities between both units and the mangalay units allow us to infer that these units gradually specialized within the mangalay units and eventually emerged as two distinct units.

3.2. Center of the Army

The central units of the Aq Qoyunlu army are referred to by different names such as “ulugh”, “uluq”, “ghol”⁹⁷, and “qalb”⁹⁸.⁹⁹ The soldiers of this key division, which was the main power center of the army, were formed from the ruler's special forces, “inaghs”, and other personal retainers. In addition

⁹² Abdülkadir Özcan, “Çarhacı”, TDV İslam Ensiklopedisi, vol. 8, İstanbul 1993.

⁹³ Khunji, a.g.e., english text, p.30.

⁹⁴ Recep Efe Çoban, Çarhacılar ve Çarha Cengi/Talimi İlişkisi Üzerine. Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi, 20(1), 1-24. 2020

⁹⁵ Rumlu, a.g.e, p.379.

⁹⁶ Paydaş, 2023, p.36-38

⁹⁷ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.126; Macit, a.g.e., p.33; Fərzəliyev, a.g.e., 47

⁹⁸ قلب Tihrani, 1993b, p. 313

⁹⁹ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.40, p. 126; Abdulkadir Özdoğan, Harezmsahlılar İmparatorluğu'nda Askeri Teşkilat (master thesis), University of Marmara, İstanbul 2004

to being extremely powerful, these units were better organized compared to other divisions. The right and left units executed maneuvers against the enemy, weakening them, and then the central units would deliver a decisive blow to achieve victory.¹⁰⁰

The strong presence of tribal hierarchy in the Aq Qoyunlu military organization¹⁰¹ ensured that the central division always remained under the ruler's command, serving as a constant reminder of who held power. During the battle between Amir Chakim and Osman Beg, Osman Beg's control of the Aq Qoyunlu army's center shows that this tradition persisted as early as the 1400s.¹⁰² This hierarchical order also manifested itself in the struggle for dominance within the Aq Qoyunlu tribal confederation. For instance, during Hamza Mirza's campaigns to Erzincan and Urfa, he personally led the central command.¹⁰³

After the Aq Qoyunlu tribal confederation became a state, the ruler always maintained control over the central command in battles, whether during Uzun Hasan's campaigns, the power struggle between Sultan Khalil and Yaqub Mirza, or in the later stages of the Aq Qoyunlu state when the ruler participated in military campaigns.

3.3. Right and Left Flanks

As previously mentioned, the Aq Qoyunlu army was organized according to a classic system consisting of two flanks within a five-part system. The influence of both Turkish and Mongolian military systems in Aq Qoyunlu military traditions has resulted in the use of two distinct types of terminology for the flanks in historical sources. Considering the first area of usage, the term “beranghar” is applied to the right flank, while “cevanghar” is used for the left flank.¹⁰⁴ This type of nomenclature can be regarded as a continuation of the Teymuri military terminology.¹⁰⁵ The second type of nomenclature, derived from the Khwarezmian and Turkish traditions, refers to the right flank as “meymene”¹⁰⁶ and the left flank as “meysere”^{107, 108}

¹⁰⁰ Özdoğan, a.g.e., p.153.

¹⁰¹ Woods, a.g.e., p.188.

¹⁰² Tihrani, 2014, p.53.

¹⁰³ Tihrani, 2014, p.95; Behramnejad, a.g.e., 95-96

¹⁰⁴ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.126

¹⁰⁵ Macit, a.g.e., p.33

¹⁰⁶ میمنه Tihrani, 1993b, p. 313

¹⁰⁷ میسره Tihrani, 1993a, p. 133; tr: Tihrani, 2014, p. 95

¹⁰⁸ Özdoğan, a.g.e., p.152; Tihrani, 2014, p.95; Rumlu, a.g.e., p.126.

Shiraliyev, N. (2024). *The Military Organization of The Aq Qoyunlu State: An Evaluation in Terms of Human Resources and Battle Order*. ANKARAD, 5(10), 109-132.

Before every major battle, the ruler would organize the right, left flanks, and the center, establishing the battle formation. In the Battle of Otlugbeli, the right flank of the Aq Qoyunlu army was commanded by Prince Zeynal Beg. Among the commanders positioned on the right flank were Shah Ali Beg Pornak, Bayandur Beg, Sufi Khalil Mosullu, and Suleyman Bican. On the left flank, Murad Bey, the son of Cihangir, Ali Khan Beg, the son of Cihangir, Qasim Beg Karamanoglu, Mansur Beg Afshar, Elaldi Beg Chepni, and Aslan Beg Zulqadar led their units.¹⁰⁹

In the 1478 battle between Sultan Khalil and Yaqub Mirza, both sides used the same battle formation. On Yaqub Bey's "meymene"¹¹⁰ were commanders like Suleyman Beg, Bahram Beg Bayrami, Iskandar Beg Pilten, and Mahmud Beg. On the "meysere" were Bayandur Beg, Hasan Aka Chelebioglu, Yusuf Beg Tawachi, and Maqsud Beg.¹¹¹ Sultan Khalil's "meymene" was organized under commanders such as Yusuf Beg, Ali Beg Bayandur, Shibli Beg, and Ali Bey and Hussein Bey, the sons of Mahmud Beg.¹¹²

In 1481, Yaqub Beg also arranged the meymene, meysere, and the "galb" of his army near Save for battle against Bayandur Beg.¹¹³

J. Woods presents intriguing ideas regarding the military organization of the Aq Qoyunlu state, particularly the arrangement of the flanks. According to his writings, the tribes assigned to the flanks of the Aq Qoyunlu army were permanently designated. He suggests that the main tribe of the right flank was the Purnaks, while the main tribe of the left flank was the Mosullus. This arrangement extended beyond the military, influencing all aspects of public life, including ceremonial seating arrangements, and played an important role in the internal politics of the state.¹¹⁴

Such an arrangement may have originally been implemented to balance the military power of both flanks during battles and over time could have contributed to power struggles between the two tribes. However, when examining the commanders participating in the Battle of Otlugbeli, it

¹⁰⁹ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.287; Tihrani, 2014, p.376.

¹¹⁰ In Khunji's writings, the expression "شجاع يمين" (shuja'-i yamin) is sometimes used to refer to the right flank. The same author uses the expression "شجاع شمال" (shuja'-i shimal) to refer to the left flank. Khunji, a.g.e., persian (farsi) text, p. 157

¹¹¹ Paydaş, 2023, p.36; Khunji, a.g.e., persian (farsi) text p. 210-214; tr. p. 30-32; Rumlu, a.g.e., p.307.

¹¹² Rumlu, a.g.e., p.308.

¹¹³ Rumlu, a.g.e., p.317; Khunji, a.g.e., english text, p.42.

¹¹⁴ Woods, a.g.e., p.19.

becomes evident that both Purnak and Mosullu commanders were positioned on the right flank, casting doubt on this theory and suggesting the situation may have been more complex.

3.4. Garavul¹¹⁵ Units

Within the military organization of the Aq Qoyunlu, one of the primary functions of the reconnaissance and intelligence units is to assess their effectiveness in three key areas: gathering information, conducting special raid operations, and protecting the camp from sudden enemy attacks. In the structure of medieval armies, reconnaissance and espionage were among the most crucial tasks, executed in the Aq Qoyunlu army by the “garavul” units. This type of unit had the ability to influence the army's movements and decision-making processes. “Garavul” units were extensively utilized in learning various factors, such as the location of enemy forces, their direction of movement, the human resources of the enemy army, their arsenal, and their psychological state.

“Garavul” units were employed even before the Aq Qoyunlu tribal confederation attained statehood. In the events of 1447 between Uzun Hasan and Qara Qoyunlu Rustam Tarkhan, Uzun Hasan assigned Mohammad Qocha Haji and Mihmad Beg as scouts to gather information about the disbanded Qara Qoyunlu forces along the banks of the Euphrates River. The scouts reported that another force had looted Madlun and was moving towards Uzun Hasan’s troops. Thanks to this reconnaissance, a timely and well-placed attack was carried out by a group of 35 soldiers against an 80-man unit, resulting in victory.¹¹⁶

Later on, the garavul unit again provided information about the troops Rustam Tarkhan had sent to counter Uzun Hasan’s raids, leading Uzun Hasan to adjust his plans accordingly.¹¹⁷ After the winter of 1448, Uzun Hasan began preparing to attack Rustam Tarkhan's residence. Garavul commanders like Gazioglu Ali and Eslemes delivered details about the location of Rustam Tarkhan’s residence to Uzun Hasan.¹¹⁸ Clearly, these garavul units played a crucial role in identifying enemy positions.

During the same events, Uzun Hasan sent Mush Ali and Tani Qara as garavul to the Astaghfirullah region, where they reported that the enemy was located

¹¹⁵ فراوان Tihrani, 1993a, p. 130

¹¹⁶ Tihrani, 2014, p.126; Rumlu, a.g.e., 168

¹¹⁷ Tihrani, 2014, p.129.

¹¹⁸ Tihrani, 2014, p.137.

near Baydu.¹¹⁹ Uzun Hasan also sent a group of garavuls from Alashkert to gather information from Emir Arabshah, and it was learned that he had moved towards Alagiz and Talin.¹²⁰

The garavul units also gathered information on the enemy's psychological state and relayed it to the army commander. In 1456, before a battle with Rustam Tarkhan, Uzun Hasan's garavuls reported that Khalil Pilten was reluctant, "caught in a mood to flee like a fly," and had withdrawn towards Haji Isa, seeking refuge in Kiğı Castle.¹²¹

Garavuls also played a critical role in identifying enemy military alliances and the forces that could strengthen their army. In 1456, Ahmad Bey Ahmadli, Amir-i-Akhur Bashlamish, and Deli Durmush, serving as garavuls for Uzun Hasan, reported that Rustam Tarkhan intended to unite the Zirki and Mirdasi commanders.¹²²

Furthermore, garavuls gathered intelligence about the enemy's military organization and supplies. During the same 1456 events, when the Qara Qoyunlus and Aq Qoyunlus clashed, Rustam Tarkhan's garavuls positioned themselves on a hilltop and collected detailed information about the Aq Qoyunlu's equipment and manpower. As a result, Uzun Hasan even considered retreating.¹²³ This example highlights an important aspect of the garavul units: they also conducted counterintelligence operations. Another instance of such reconnaissance occurred in 1464, when Uzun Hasan's garavuls reported that the enemy had gathered a 30,000-strong military force from Syrian Turks during the siege of Harput Castle.¹²⁴

As previously mentioned, garavul units were not only responsible for reconnaissance but also for securing the area around the camp to prevent surprise enemy attacks. Although we do not find direct examples of such assignments in the Aq Qoyunlu army, it is known that Qara Qoyunlu Jahan Shah assigned garavul units to guard the surroundings and roads of the camp.¹²⁵ Similar assignments can be observed in the Timurid army as well.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Tihrani, 2014, p.141.

¹²⁰ Tihrani, 2014, p.154.

¹²¹ Tihrani, 2014, p.173.

¹²² Tihrani, 2014, p.175.

¹²³ Tihrani, 2014, p.178.

¹²⁴ Tihrani, 2014, p.257.

¹²⁵ Tihrani, 2014, p.267.

¹²⁶ Macit, a.g.e., p.27.

Garavul units were also extensively used for surprise attacks on enemy camps, sabotaging both military units and essential supplies, and for “spy hunting”-identifying and neutralizing enemy scouts. One significant example of these operations occurred during Sultan Abu-Saeed Timuri's campaign in Azerbaijan. After the Timurids plundered the region, Aq Qoyunlu commanders organized a series of attacks using garavul units. The first such attack was led by Hussein Qocha Haji, who killed several enemy soldiers. Following this, Shah Ali Beg's garavuls attacked and killed 50 soldiers from the Sultan's forces. Subsequently, Khizir Beg Tarkhan, and later Prince Ughurlu Muhammad, carried out similar raids. Sultan Hamza and Uveys Beg organized a night raid on the Timurid camp. Shah Mansur, Hussein Uveys, and Zun-Nun were also tasked with leading garavul units to attack the enemy. These operations caused significant psychological strain and disorganization within Sultan Abu-Saeed's camp.¹²⁷

In 1467, before the Battle of Mush, Qasim Parvanечи was assigned to lead the Qara Qoyunlu garavul unit. Upon crossing the Euphrates River, Prince Sultan Khalil, commander of the Aq Qoyunlu garavul unit, learned of their movements and launched an attack, resulting in 80 enemy deaths and 60 captives. Many members of the Qara Qoyunlu garavul unit drowned in the river.¹²⁸ This military operation, which could be described as "spy hunting" in modern intelligence terms, caused panic among the Qara Qoyunlu forces and directly impacted Jahan Shah himself.

Conclusion

When evaluating the human element of the Aq Qoyunlu military, as previously mentioned, research has been conducted by considering two primary phases. In the first phase, which includes the early years of the tribal confederation, the military forces were largely composed of “special units” that were directly subordinate to their leader. This structure closely mirrored the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Aq Qoyunlu, emphasizing how the traditions of steppe life were reflected in their military organization. During this period, tribal alliances, particularly those focused on conducting raids for plunder and strengthening their power, did not require large, organized armies. As a result, military forces were formed primarily from the personal retinues of various tribal leaders and military nobles.

In these early years, the use of trusted individuals in forming these units played a critical role, both in ensuring the loyalty of the troops to their leaders and in enhancing the offensive power of the Aq Qoyunlu forces.

¹²⁷ Tihrani, 2014.

¹²⁸ Tihrani, 2014, p.273.

Moreover, this approach laid the groundwork for the eventual growth and professionalization of military cadres, which would become essential in the later development of a larger imperial army. Following the decisive victory over Timurid Abu Sa'id, the Aq Qoyunlu confederation, having established de facto imperial authority over Iran, Azerbaijan, and Iraq-i Ajam, faced a growing need for more robust and systematic military units. This need led to the formation of provincial armies based on the "tiyul" system, wherein commanders were granted landholdings in return for their military service, thus creating forces directly subordinate to the central government.

From this period onward, the core strength of the Aq Qoyunlu military was provided by provincial forces, which were particularly mobilized against external enemies. Sources frequently reference armies from provinces such as Fars, Diyarbakir, and Azerbaijan, illustrating both the administrative division of these regions and the independent assessment of their provincial forces. Alongside this territorial expansion, the personal forces of the Aq Qoyunlu rulers and their commanders also grew significantly, though they never surpassed the provincial forces in terms of size. Consequently, despite their numerical increase, these personal forces lost much of their previous strength and influence within the overall military structure.

An analysis of the existing facts reveals that it is difficult to describe the Aq Qoyunlu state's military system as a structured and unified army. Rather, this system was predominantly shaped by individual influence and the strength of personal authority. Particularly in the early stages of the state, the formation of a confederate army through the unification of various tribal forces significantly impeded both the legitimacy of governance and efforts toward state centralization.

Uzun Hasan played a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. During his reign, military-nomadic elites were granted soyurghals and removed from direct military administration. This was part of broader efforts to centralize the state and establish a centralized army. While this policy proved somewhat effective in weakening smaller local elites, it was less successful in diminishing the influence of larger tribal power centers. Consequently, these tribes retained their sway within the political system.

The creation of a personal military force of approximately 25,000–30,000 by Uzun Hasan reflects his dual objectives: to strengthen the foundations of his authority and to utilize a deterrent force against potential uprisings by these elites. The state, aiming to weaken the role of nomadic military elites, utilized the tiyul system to organize their non-permanent armies into provincial forces. This approach became the foundation for organizing the main military forces of the state.

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Another noteworthy aspect is the diminished role of Turkmen tribal unions, widely discussed during the tribal confederation period, within the military organization of the Aq Qoyunlu during the state-building process. These tribal unions were overshadowed by the hassa and tiyul-based provincial forces. This phenomenon can be seen as one of the direct outcomes of the centralization policy.

The cornerstone of the Aq Qoyunlu military system was the concentration of the largest military forces under the sole authority of the ruler, particularly Uzun Hasan. However, the mechanisms required to maintain this balance of power were not effectively sustained by the Aq Qoyunlu rulers who came to power after the 1490s. As a result, internal power struggles and divisions within the upper military elite emerged, leading to a governance crisis and ultimately paving the way for the decline of the state.

Evaluating the human element of the Aq Qoyunlu army in this manner also offers a clearer understanding of their military organization and battle formation. The Aq Qoyunlu forces, which were divided into advance units, right-wing, left-wing, and central units, operated within a professional structure. Prior to battle, they would assume formations according to these divisions and, when necessary, conduct reconnaissance operations or reconnaissance raids using “garavul” units to gather intelligence on enemy positions.

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