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Uzun Hasan's Personality in Italian Sources

Abstract

The article analyses the personality of Uzun Hasan, one of the powerful Azerbaijani rulers of the 15th century, based on the accounts of Italian ambassadors. Both his human qualities and his qualities as a ruler attracted the attention of Italian ambassadors. Since it is known that local sources were written at the behest of the rulers, we do not find any comments or criticisms on the characteristics of any of our ruler. Because in local sources, the ruler is usually praised and the description of his victories is preferred. The descriptions given in Italian sources are very valuable. It is known that the alliance between the Republic of Venice and the Akkoyunlu state became stronger starting from the second half of the 15th century. The Ottoman state was a source of danger for both sides. Uzun Hasan, considered a strong ally against the Ottoman threat, was especially valued by Venice. Because Uzun Hasan was interested in joint actions against the Ottoman state. For this reason, several ambassadors were sent to the Akkoyunlu palace by the Venetian Senate. The Italian ambassadors Zeno, Barbaro, Contarini stayed with Uzun Hassan for a long time. For this reason, they had an opportunity to follow the life and activities of the ruler. They tried to interpret and present the characteristics of Uzun Hasan in different ways, both as a person and as a ruler. It is interesting to pay attention to the writings of these ambassadors and learn about the personality of Uzun Hassan on the basis of the mentioned. In these descriptions, we can see and examine both the physical characteristics and moral aspects of Uzun Hasan, his life and behaviour.

Keywords: Uzun Hasan, Contarini, Tabriz, Venice, Zeno

İtalyan Kaynaklarında Uzun Hasan'in Kişiliği



Öz

Bu makale, 15. yüzyılın güçlü Azerbaycan hükümdarlarından biri olan Uzun Hasan'ın kişiliğini İtalyan elçilerin anlatılarına dayanarak analiz etmektedir. Uzun Hasan'ın hem insani özellikleri hem de bir hükümdar olarak nitelikleri İtalyan elçilerin dikkatini çekmiştir. Yerel kaynakların hükümdarların emriyle yazıldığı bilindiğinden, herhangi bir hükümdarımızın özellikleri hakkında yorum veya eleştiriye rastlamıyoruz. Çünkü yerel kaynaklarda genellikle hükümdar övülür ve zaferlerinin tasviri tercih edilir. İtalyan kaynaklarında verilen tasvirler çok değerlidir. Venedik Cumhuriyeti ile Akkoyunlu Devleti arasındaki ittifakın 15. yüzyılın ikinci yarısından itibaren güçlendiği bilinmektedir. Osmanlı Devleti her iki taraf için de bir tehlike kaynağıydı. Osmanlı tehdidine karşı güçlü bir müttefik olarak görülen Uzun Hasan, Venedik tarafından özellikle önemseniyordu. Çünkü Uzun Hasan, Osmanlı Devleti'ne karşı ortak hareket etmekle ilgileniyordu. Bu nedenle Venedik Senatosu tarafından Akkoyunlu sarayına birkaç elçi gönderildi. İtalyan elçiler Zeno, Barbaro, Contarini Uzun Hasan'ın yanında uzun süre kaldılar. Bu nedenle hükümdarın hayatını ve faaliyetlerini takip etme fırsatı buldular. Uzun Hasan'ın hem bir insan hem de bir hükümdar olarak özelliklerini farklı şekillerde yorumlamaya ve sunmaya çalışılar. Bu elçilerin yazdıklarına dikkat etmek ve bahsedilenlere dayanarak Uzun Hasan'ın kişiliği hakkında bilgi edinmek ilginçtir. Bu tasvirlerde, Uzun Hasan'ın hem fiziksel özelliklerini hem de ahlaki yönlerini, yaşamını ve davranışlarını görebilir ve inceleyebiliriz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzun Hasan, Contarini, Tebriz, Venedik, Zeno

Introduction

The information available in contemporary sources about Uzun Hasan, the most powerful ruler of the Akkoyunlu state, who created a large empire and paid special attention to the developing political and diplomatic relations with European states, is of interest. Uzun Hasan's personality is often mentioned in Italian sources of the period. Thus, we can obtain information and knowledge about his appearance, characteristics of rule, lifestyle, customs, moral aspects, behaviors, and activities in Italian sources. Uzun Hasan's personality and his activities as a ruler were followed with interest in European palaces at that time, and the ambassadors-diplomats and travelers who came to this country noted his features in their works, during their travels, both in terms of satisfying the interests of their states and for themselves. Thus, since those who described Uzun Hasan's personality were ambassadors-travelers who met and communicated with him, their information is of interest to us. Because they tried to interpret and present both Uzun Hasan's personality as a person and his characteristics as a ruler from various perspectives.

Uzun Hasan, who ruled the Akkoyunlu principality after 1453, expanded the territory of the lands he ruled as a result of his policy, defeated the Garagoyunlu, ascended the throne of

Tabriz, and founded the Akkoyunlu state of Azerbaijan. Uzun Hasan was born in 1423 (Hinz, 1992). His father is Ali Bey, the son of Gara Yulug Osman Bey, and his mother is Saray khatun, the daughter of Pir Ali Bey. No records on this issue were found in the researched Italian sources.

1. Physical and Moral Description of the Ruler

First of all, it should be noted that there are several Italian sources regarding the physical appearance of Uzun Hasan. Domenico Del Carretto, who visited the territory of the Akkoyunlu state in 1468 for trading purposes, described Uzun Hasan as follows: "*He is big, broad-shouldered, and it is terrible to see all the [body] parts of a beautiful person, his black eyes as if they were drawn [by hand]*" (Berchet, 1865, p. 97). Contarini, who traveled with him to Qom, analyzed the personality of Uzun Hasan and wrote in his travelogue that he was a man worthy of praise for his behavior and actions... a tall, and thin man. His face has slight Tatar features and facial expressions in a steady tone. He looks like a man of 70 years old. Overall, he is a very noble person" (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini., 1873, p. 132-133; Zeno & Contarini, 2021, p. 101). The greatness of Uzun Hasan's personality always amazed the Italian ambassadors and left a pleasant impression on them. When describing Uzun Hasan, Zeno noted that he was brave, heroic and free from all kinds of difficulties, adding that this was a virtue rarely attributed to great rulers (A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 1873, p. 5; Zeno & Contarini, 2021, p. 11). Even an anonymous Italian merchant who later traveled in the country but never met Uzun Hasan, considered him to be a great and valuable person who had no equal in these lands due to his fame and personality (A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 1873, p. 178). Domenico Del Carretto noted in his information: "*Ussun (Uzun Hasan-A.O.) is reliable, wise and very courageous, he is as liberal, good-natured and noble as he is brave*" With these remarks, the Italian merchant tried to explain the characteristic features of Uzun Hasan (Berchet, 1865, p. 97). Uzun Hasan impressed the Italian ambassadors with his justice, heroism, respect and value, his loyalty to the traditions of his ancestors, his attitude towards his wife Despina Khanum, and his kind behavior towards the ambassadors who came to his palace. He was always respected by the people around him for these qualities. The attitude towards him by his entourage also caught the attention of Zeno. Uzun Hasan was such a ruler that the Turkmen beys obeyed him unconditionally, and even the most senior in rank who could enter his tent did not dare to speak. They would stand silent before the ruler, one might say, but only the ruler would speak, and everything he said would be unconditionally approved and

followed. Zeno notes: “*There would be such silence in the camp that one would feel like in a temple*” (Hinz, 1992, p. 58; Mahmudov, 2011, p. 366-367). This information clearly shows the respect, loyalty, and obedience of the Turkmen beys to their rulers. Contarini, who was sent to Hasan Shah, met the Turkmens on the way. The Turkmens stopped Contarini on the way, but after learning that he was going to the ruler, they immediately allowed the Italian ambassador to continue his journey. This also showed the respect, love, and at the same time, fear of the Turkmens for their rulers. Because if the ambassador was harmed in any way, the ruler would immediately punish those who did it (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini., 1873, p. 125; Zeno & Contarini, 2021, p. 91).

2. Justice and loyalty of Uzun Hasan

Uzun Hasan also differed from other rulers in protecting his people. According to Zeno's record, Jahanshah had demanded 300 Mamluk guys (slaves) from Uzun Hasan as a tribute. Jahanshah had stated that if this was not done, there would be no agreement for peace. However, Uzun Hasan's response to Jahanshah brought him closer to his people. Uzun Hasan had stated in his response: *“If Jahanshah tries to separate them from their fathers and mothers by the sword, I will not consent to it in any way. Even if I know that I will have to give my life for it, I will still do it”* (A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 1873, p. 7; Zeno & Contarini, 2021, p. 13). Zeno also notes that from then on, there was no one in the country who would not lay down his life for him. He was always fair and merciful towards his people and therefore was known in the sources as a just sultan (Necefli, 2012). Uzun Hasan was a personality who turned the Akkoyunlu state into a great empire. He valued every subject living in this empire, respected their customs and traditions. He remained faithful to his ancestral traditions and migrated from time to time, going to vast areas of the country and setting up tents, and thousands of people migrated with him. In this regard, Barbaro notes: *“... after the festivities were over, the king began to migrate in accordance with his custom. He asked me whether I was inclined to go with him or whether I would choose to stay in my place and be comfortable. When I told him that I preferred to remain in his service in pain and suffering, rather than living in abundance where I was, he was pleased with my answer”* (Viaggi fatti da Vinetia, alla Tana, in Persia, in India et in Costantinopoli, 1543, p. 40; Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, 1873, p. 63; Barbaro, 2016, p. 68). Later, Uzun Hasan sent money, horse and tent for the Venetian ambassador who chose to come with him. It is clear from Barbaro's notes that the king and his retinue set off to go to places where there was water and pasture. Even his nobles, women, children, and servants

migrated with the Shah. Interestingly, while migrating with all his people, the Shah lived far from the city and his palace for a long time, and all his belongings were transported by pack animals (Viaggi fatti da Vinetia, alla Tana, in Persia, in India et in Costantinopoli, 1543, p. 41; Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, 1873, p. 63; Barbaro, 2016). Barbaro tried to provide information about the number of people who migrated with the Shah and was amazed at the fact that they did not experience any difficulties during the trip and the way of life of the people. The Italian ambassador notes that if anyone believes the information he wrote in the future, it will be revealed that everything is true after coming and seeing these places.

Uzun Hasan was also a man of his word. When he married the daughter of the ruler of Trabzon, he kept his promise that she would remain in her religion. In this regard, Zeno writes: *“Despina was one of the most religious women of her time. Every day she performed the sacrament of Holy Communion according to the rules of the Greek Church. Although her husband belonged to a different religion and was hostile to his wife's religion, he never said anything to her about this matter and did not force her to abandon her religion”* (A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 1873, p. 14). After that, Zeno did not hide his astonishment and surprise, emphasizing the relationship between them. “How is it that they are in such harmony with each other and there is such love and affection between the two of them” (A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 1873, p. 14). From Italian sources, we are aware of Uzun Hasan's high regard for his wife, as well as Despina's high prestige in the palace. It is even possible to see Despina's role in Uzun Hasan's letter to the Georgian king inciting him to war against the Ottomans from Zeno's notes. Thus, we can confirm the high position of women in the Akkoyunlu palace, their activity in state administration, and the great influence of Sara Khatun in state administration with these sources. This is also evident in the instructions given to the ambassadors sent to the Akkoyunlu palace. The instructions sent by the Venetian government to Barbaro on February 11, 1473, such as the sentences *“visit the ruler's mother, show her respect, and give her gifts”* prove this. (Mahmudov, 2011, p. 404).

3. The virtues of rule

Uzun Hasan's attitude towards his defeated enemy on the battlefield also showed the greatness of his personality. After defeating Jahanshah in 1468, he decided on the fate of the Karakoyun emirs. According to Rumlu, Sultan Hasan ordered that the Karakoyun's property should not be touched and that they should be allowed to return to their places safely. Uzun

Hasan also instructed his men not to pursue the opposing army (Rumlu, 2022). The words that Uzun Hasan said to the fleeing enemy after the victory in Malatya were an indicator of the height of his military leadership. We read this from *Zeno's notes*: "*he was intelligent, farsighted, and in military science he always kept in mind the formula make the roads for the fleeing enemy out of gold and the bridges out of silver*" (A Narrative of Italian travels in Persia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, 1873, p. 27; Zeno & Contarini, 2021, p. 32). The Ottoman sultan Fatih Mehmed told him that "what you have done is not befitting a great lord." However, Uzun Hasan's response, "*Whatever I have done, I have done with my sword in my hand*," reveals his courage and heroism, and his courageous stance in the face of the enemy. (Berchet, 1865, p. 101; Yıldız, 2019). According to Abubakr Tehrani, it should be noted that Uzun Hasan, who went to fight with Mehmed's army, told the messenger sent by the sultan that they would fight bravely, that they would either win or die bravely. After that, he gathered his entire army and went to battle (Tehrani, 2014). Uzun Hasan's attitude towards the ambassadors who came to his palace should also be emphasized. Zeno, who was sent by Venice, was greeted with special joy and respect at Akkoyunlu palace. We learn from his notes that the ambassador was shown special respect in the palace, and that food prepared by the ruler from the palace kitchen was sent for him every day. At the same time, Contarini, who came to Uzun Hasan's presence, also mentioned in his travelogue that the sultan received him with his men, received his credentials, and listened to him. The sultan also ordered that the ambassador be treated with special respect. The ambassador also wrote about the sultan's lifestyle, food culture, and being invited to this table (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, 1873). Later, Contarini noted that he sat at the same table with him. "*They attend entertainment parties with 400 or more people a day and sit together. They eat their meals in copper bowls. It was a great honor to sit at the same table with the Shah*" (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini., 1873, p. 132-133; Zeno & Contarini, 2021, p. 101). It should be noted that Contarini was unable to meet Uzun Hasan when he arrived in Tabriz, because he was in Shiraz at that time due to the rebellion raised by Shah Ugurlu Muhammad. Later, the ambassador was able to meet the Shah in Isfahan. We can see the Shah's attitude towards the ambassadors who came to his palace, and the gifts he gave to Friar Lodovico and other ambassadors in Contarini's information: "...*the patriarch and I received from the Shah two very elegant robes made in the Persian fashion. We went back to the Shah and after greeting him, we returned to our room. The Shah sent each of us a small amount of money, a horse and some things of no great importance as gifts*" (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and

Ambrogio Contarini, 1873, p. 135-136). Uzun Hasan treated the ambassadors who came to his palace with special respect and honor. This shows that he knew the diplomatic rules and the hospitality shown to diplomatic representatives with all precision. Contarini notes in his travelogue: "*He often sent us small gifts such as food and drink. He showed us great kindness and was very generous and gracious towards us. We never suffered any trouble (harm) from those around him or from other people*" (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, 1873, p. 134). The ruler of Akkoyunlu also tried to compensate the ambassadors who came to his palace for any damage they suffered. The ruler ordered that Barbaro, who was robbed on the way to Akkoyunlu's palace, inform him about what the robbers had taken from him and that the compensation be returned to the ambassador (Viaggi fatti da Vinetia, alla Tana, in Persia, in India et in Costantinopoli, 1543; Barbaro, 2016). The ruler treated Barbaro with special respect and honor. He even made the Italian ambassador sit next to him at the welcoming ceremony for the ambassador from India. Moreover, Barbaro also valued the gifts brought by the Indian ambassador at the request of the ruler. Barbaro described the welcoming ceremony of the Indian ambassadors who came to the palace in his travelogue: "*A grand welcome was prepared for the arrival of the Indian ambassadors. The palace staff wore colorful silk and woolen clothes. 40 of the most important statesmen were sitting in the palace. 100 people stood in the entrance, 200 outside, about 50 at the door, and about 20 people on the street. There were 4,000 cavalrymen. While everyone was standing in this order, two Indian ambassadors arrived*" (Viaggi fatti da Vinetia, alla Tana, in Persia, in India et in Costantinopoli, 1543, p. 35-36; Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, 1873, p. 55; Barbaro, 2016). These remarks prove Uzun Hasan's sincere attitude and respect for the ambassadors, his high values as a ruler, and the depth of his ruling qualities.

We can only find information about the end of the life of the powerful ruler in Barbaro's notes. Because in the last days of his life, only he remained in the Akkoyunlu lands. Other Venetian ambassadors had already left the country. Barbaro notes about the death of Uzun Hasan: "*When I arrived in Tabriz, I found Hasan bey sick. The next day was Epiphany day and he died*" (Travels to Tana and Persia by Josafa Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini, 1873, p. 93). Epiphany day is January 6, and according to Barbaro, Uzun Hasan died on that date. Al-Qiyasi also notes the date of January 2, 1478, regarding the death of Uzun Hasan. Uzun Hasan died shortly after returning from his trip to Georgia. In this regard, historian Fazlullah Khunci also noted that his condition worsened after his return from the trip (Yıldız, 2019). Hasan Bey Rumlu writes about the death of Uzun Hasan that a few days after the death of Ughurlu Muhammad,

on the evening of Fitra 882 (January 5, 1478), Uzun Hasan died (Rumlu, 2017). Abunash Hasan Bahadur died at the age of fifty-five from a long-term illness near Tabriz and was buried in his mausoleum in the Nasriye district. Under this ruler, the Akkoyunlu had established an empire by taking a large part of the central Islamic lands from a small principality in Eastern Anatolia under their rule. While Uzun Hasan's centralization policy paved the way for the flourishing of a high Islamic culture in Tabriz during the reign of his son, Yaqub Sultan, later, bureaucratic inter-tribal tensions shook the foundations of the empire and the empire gradually began to collapse (Woods, 1999). Regarding Uzun Hasan's authority and personality, Hasan Bey Rumlu noted: *"He was a king who possessed great power and possessed justice that could not be expressed in words. He would hold meetings with scholars and virtuous people. Hadith and interpretation would be discussed in his meetings. He himself knew these topics. He showed great respect to the Sayyids, Sheikhs and scholars. The duration of his reign was eleven years. His country was Diyarbakir, Azerbaijan, Iraqi-Arab, Iraqi-Ajam, Persia and Kirman"* (Rumlu, 2017, p. 302).

Conclusions

In general, we have enough information about Uzun Hasan's personality from the Italian sources of the period and based on these, we can get the opportunity to evaluate his personality. Whether it is his appearance, lifestyle, behavior, or characteristics of his rule, what is written about him confirms that he was one of the most powerful Turkish rulers of the time. The main responsible duties of the authors of the Italian sources were to provide comprehensive information to their states, and therefore they had to study every feature of the ruler they were sent as ambassadors and inform their states. For this reason, the authors observed and admired both the physical characteristics of the ruler and his behavior, decisions, and actions based on his inner qualities - in short, every aspect of his personality. It is no coincidence that Uzun Hasan as a ruler, had a very high influence on Italian ambassadors and travelers with his justice, state administration ability, and heroism and was remembered with glorious traces in all the sources of the period.

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