

SELJUK LEGACY IN TURKISH HISTORICAL STUDIES AND THE FORMATION OF STATESMANSHIP TRADITIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the Seljuk heritage is interpreted in Turkish historiography in the context of the formation of state traditions in Azerbaijan. The main aim of the study is to systematize the assessments given to the Seljuk period in Turkish scientific literature, to determine the possible effects of this heritage on the political and administrative development of Azerbaijan, and to reveal the main directions of this issue from the point of view of historiography. The article shows that in modern Turkish historiography, the Seljuk period is no longer analyzed only in terms of military campaigns and territorial conquests, but also in the framework of state-building, political legitimacy, governance model, provincial organization, and regional integration. In this approach, Azerbaijan is presented not only as a border area, but as one of the important pillars of both Turkmen settlement and political and strategic activities carried out in the direction of Anatolia. The article also focuses on such topics as the iqta system, urban and provincial governance, relations with the khaliphate, and the political and administrative stability during the later Atabeg period. Overall, the article concludes that Turkish historiography does not view the Seljuk legacy as a fully established model of statehood traditions in Azerbaijan. Rather, it sees it as a crucial historical stage that accelerated the development of state traditions and laid the groundwork for political culture and governance practices in the region.

Keywords: Seljuks, Azerbaijan, statesmanship tradition, Turkish historiography, political legitimacy, iqta system

1. INTRODUCTION

Seljuk studies in Turkish historiography have evolved through several stages and gradually developed into a more independent, systematic, and specialized field of academic research. In the earlier periods, the history of the Seljuks was primarily explored within the context of the entire Turkic history, Turkic state traditions, and the strengthening of Turkic political influence in the Islamic world. At this stage, the political activity of the Seljuks was mainly presented as a significant direction within the topic of overall Turkic history, while the distinct political, administrative, and cultural characteristics of the period were treated in a relatively general form. Thus, the formation of the Seljuk period as a separate and systematic direction of scientific Research was more clearly completed in the later stages. From this stage, Seljuk history began to be studied not only in terms of military campaigns, conquest processes, and the sequence of political events, but also in terms of state-building, political legitimacy, administrative traditions, the city and provincial system, as well as regional integration issues.

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For this reason, Seljuk history has acquired a broader political, administrative, and institutional context in Turkish historiography (Bunyadov, 2007, pp. 58, 114–117). Within this approach, the position of Azerbaijan in the 11th-12th centuries is of particular importance. In the studies of Turkish historians, Azerbaijan is characterized not just as a captured territory or a transit region for the Seljuks, but as a strategically, politically, and administratively important geography. Azerbaijan held an important place in Seljuk policy, especially in terms of the settlement of Turkmen tribes in the region, the determination of movement routes towards Anatolia, the struggle against Byzantium, and the strengthening of political control in the South Caucasus. In this sense, Azerbaijan was both a military-strategic stronghold and one of the important links of the Seljuk political system in terms of regional governance. Turkish historians also note that Azerbaijan was considered an important strategic area for the Seljuks in the context of the settlement of Turks, the transition to Anatolia, and the struggle against Byzantium (Kesik, 2023, p. 342).

In addition, research conducted on provincial and urban administration in the Great Seljuk state shows Azerbaijan, especially centers such as Ganja, as important administrative units. This shows that the region did not function solely as a border zone or military outpost within the empire, but rather was an active and functional space in terms of administration. The integration of Azerbaijani cities into the Seljuk state system in terms of political governance, tax collection mechanisms, military control, trade routes, and local government structures further strengthened the region's role within the empire. From this perspective, Azerbaijan can be viewed not as a peripheral and secondary territory in the Seljuk political geography, but as a region with an important coordinating position between the central government and regional administration.

As a result, in Turkish historiography, Azerbaijan is presented not as a passive border region of the Seljuk political geography, but as one of the important pillars and strategic directions of this system. This approach demonstrates that Azerbaijan occupied a significant place in the Seljuk system of power not only in geographic terms, but also in political-administrative, military-strategic, and cultural dimensions. At the same time, this approach enables the 11th and 12th century phase of Azerbaijani history to be viewed within the context of Turkic statehood traditions. In this regard, the study of Azerbaijan during the Seljuk period holds considerable scientific importance in Turkish historiography for understanding regional political dynamics and for analyzing the formation and development of Turkish statehood practices.

2. INTERPRETATION OF SELJUK LEGACY IN TURKISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

One of the key issues in the analysis of the Seljuk period within Turkish historiography is the matter of legitimacy. In the approaches of Turkish historians, Seljuk rule is not viewed solely in terms of military success and territorial expansion; rather, it is interpreted as a model of statehood reinforced by religious and political foundations. In this context, the research of Ayan Ergin demonstrates that, following the victory of the Seljuks at Dandanakan, the Seljuks' establishment of relations with the Abbasid Caliphate and their formal recognition by the caliph conferred legitimacy upon their rule not only through military power but also through religious and political validation (Ayan, 2012, pp. 29–32). As a result, the Seljuks gained a stronger political position in the Islamic world, and their rule was recognized as a legitimate form of governance in the Muslim East.

At the same time, the position of Azerbaijan in the Seljuk political strategy is of particular importance in Turkish historiography. The geographical and strategic position of Azerbaijan played an important role in the westward expansion of the Seljuk political project. Specifically, prior to the Battle of Malazgirt, Azerbaijan served as one of the principal regions for the settlement and concentration of Turkmen forces, and after the battle, it functioned as a primary launching point for Seljuk expansion into Anatolia (Soofizadeh, 2023, p. 68). From this point of view, Azerbaijan was not only a transitional territory but a strategic center where military-political initiatives were coordinated, Turkic tribes were settled, and regional authority was established. These two directions, namely, the ideological foundations of legitimacy and the geographical-strategic position of Azerbaijan, more clearly illustrate Azerbaijan's role within the Seljuk

political system in Turkish historiography (Sharifli, 2013, p. 29, 156–158).

Modern Turkish historians increasingly evaluate the Seljuk legacy through the perspective of state institutions and governance mechanisms. Within this approach, the Seljuk state is presented not simply as a military-feudal formation, but as a developed model of governance in terms of political administration, economic regulation, and military organization. In particular, Goksu emphasizes that the iqta system developed under the guidance of Nizamulmulk refined earlier administrative practices and endowed them with administrative, economic, and military coherence, thereby providing a model for subsequent Turkic Muslim states (Goksu, 2018, pp. 156–159). The iqta system, in addition to strengthening the central government's control over the regions, was an important tool in terms of maintaining military forces, managing land revenues, and connecting the provinces to the state system.

At the same time, it is emphasized that the Great Seljuk city and provincial administration was built on political-military, financial, and religious-legal structures. Positions such as melik, vali, amid, reis, naib, and shahne acted as representative mechanisms of the central government in the regions (Huseynzade, 2010, pp. 81–84). Through these positions, administrative management was ensured, political control over cities and provinces was strengthened, and the connection of local forces with the central government was maintained. From this perspective, the Seljuk legacy in Turkish historiography is explained not only as a past state form, but also as a management practice, legitimacy model, and institutional tradition transmitted to subsequent regional political structures (Kafesoglu, 2014, p. 279).

3. SELJUK HERITAGE IN TERMS OF THE FORMATION OF STATEHOOD TRADITIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

The role played by Azerbaijan in the Seljuk political space also had a serious impact on the subsequent regional statehood experience. The inclusion of Azerbaijan in the imperial system during the Seljuk period not only resulted in the establishment of military-political control here, but also created conditions for the strengthening of administrative institutions, provincial organization, and the concept of legitimate authority. In this sense, the emergence of the state of the Atabey of Azerbaijan is of particular importance. Huseyn Kayhan shows that Atabey Eldaniz gained strength in Nakhchivan, quickly becoming one of the most influential political figures in the entire region, and later succeeded in creating a stable political structure centered on Azerbaijan (Kayhan, 2018, pp. 45–47). This process shows that the political and administrative experience gained by Azerbaijan during the Seljuk period transformed into a new form of statehood at a later stage.

The emergence of the Atabey state did not occur in an empty political context. The background to its formation was the integration of Azerbaijan into the earlier Seljuk military-political system. The provincial system, military control mechanisms, iqta practice, and local government structures existing in the Seljuk governance model were continued during the Atabey period, adapting them to new conditions. From this perspective, the Atabey state can be assessed as the continuation and development of the Seljuk political heritage in the Azerbaijani environment. Nakhchivan, Ganja and other urban centers of Azerbaijan acted in this process not only as administrative centers, but also as centers where political decisions were made, military forces were organized and statehood traditions were strengthened (Jafarov, 2024, pp. 39–42, 124, 177–180).

In Turkish historiography, this continuity is not explained solely as a transfer of power from one political force to another. The focus here is on the survival of the administrative habits, notions of legitimacy, and institutional mechanisms formed during the Seljuk period in subsequent Turkic-Muslim states. Kelesh notes that Azerbaijan's role as a regional center, military base, and a place where Turkmen settlements were organized during the Seljuk period strengthened the habits of central authority, regional administration, and political control in the region (Kelesh, 2019, p. 302). These factors formed the basis of a political experience that played an important role in the subsequent history of Azerbaijan's statehood. On the other hand, the legitimacy model and governance institutions such as iqta, which emerged from relations

with the caliphate, continued to exist in subsequent Turkic-Muslim political structures. From this perspective, the Seljuk heritage influenced the development of statehood traditions in Azerbaijan not only in terms of the form of political power, but also in terms of governance culture, legal and political legitimacy, and regional organization.

Thus, in Turkish historiography, the Seljuk legacy is characterized as a historical and political stage that played an important role in the formation of statehood traditions in Azerbaijan. This approach allows us to evaluate the Seljuk period as one of the main foundation layers of later political institutions in terms of governance practice, legitimacy model, and institutional succession (Burgu, 2018, pp. 84–87).

4.CONCLUSION

Thus, in Turkish historiography, the Seljuk period is characterized as an important historical and political stage in the history of the formation and development of Azerbaijani statehood traditions. In this approach, the activities of the Seljuks in the territory of Azerbaijan are not explained only in the context of military campaigns and conquests, but the political, administrative and ideological consequences of these processes are also brought to the fore. In this context, the focus is on the conquests themselves, as well as the principles of political legitimacy, administrative management structures, provincial organization, military-political control mechanisms, and regional integration model that emerged as a result of them.

In Turkish historiography, Azerbaijan is considered one of the important pillars of the Seljuk political system. In particular, Azerbaijan's geographical position, location on trade routes, development of urban centers, and military-strategic importance led to its special place in the Seljuk state administration. During this period, the strengthening of city-provincial administration, the integration of local government structures into the general imperial system, and the establishment of a certain balance between central government and regional administration had a significant impact on the development of Azerbaijani statehood traditions.

The strategic importance of Azerbaijan within the Seljuk political system, its special position in city and provincial administration, as well as the political and institutional traditions that continued during the Atabey period, prove that this historical heritage had a significant impact on subsequent statehood practice. The formation of the Atabey state also shows that the principles of Seljuk governance lived on in the Azerbaijani political environment and acquired new content in accordance with local historical and political conditions. In this sense, it is possible to evaluate the Seljuk period not only as a transitional stage in the history of Azerbaijan, but also as an important historical foundation that influenced the formation of subsequent political institutions.

Therefore, the Seljuk heritage should not be viewed as a temporary and accidental event in the history of Azerbaijan, but as an important historical layer that influenced the development of statehood traditions, the formation of political thought, and the maturation of administrative practice. The approaches put forward in Turkish historiography on this topic allow us to evaluate the place of the Seljuk period in the history of Azerbaijani statehood within the framework of broader pan-Turkic political traditions. This shows the importance of examining this topic not only from the perspective of political history, but also from the perspective of the idea of statehood, the culture of governance, and issues of historical succession.

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