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## **The Military-Political Role of I Shah Ismail in the Establishment of the Safavid Empire**

### **Abstract**

The 16th century is a historical period characterized by the beginning of a new phase in world history. This historical period ended with the political unification of national regions and the formation of centralized states in most Western European countries. In Asian countries, however, a somewhat specific type of state emerged. One of these states was the Safavid state, a historical Azerbaijani state that existed from 1501-1736, from the early 16th century to the mid-18th century. Emerging at the beginning of the 16th century, the Azerbaijani Safavid state was the successor of the Akkoyunlu state in terms of territory and ethnicity, but differed significantly from it. The formation of this state was not due to a dynastic change, but to the complex socio-political situation and economic processes taking place in Azerbaijan and the neighboring countries of the Middle East. At different times, the territory of the state was 2 million 800 thousand sq.km, 3 million sq.km which included present-day northern Azerbaijan, the eastern regions of Turkey, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, western Pakistan and Uzbekistan. It should also be noted that Shah Ismail Khatai's policy was to unite the northern and southern parts of Azerbaijan. With the military-political activities of Shah Ismail Khatai in 1501-1514, the northern and southern provinces of Azerbaijan were integrated into a single, relatively centralized territory of the Safavid state.

**Keywords:** *Akkoyunlu, I Shah Ismail, Azerbaijan, Tabriz, Baku, Karl Marx*

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## **I Şah İsmayılın Səfəvi İmperiyasının qurulmasında hərbi-siyasi rolu**

### **Xülasə**

XVI əsr dünya tarixində yeni mərhələnin başlanması ilə səciyyələnən tarixi dövrdür. Bu tarixi dövr əksər Qərbi Avropa ölkələrində milli bölgələrin siyasi birləşməsi və mərkəzləşdirilmiş dövlətlərin yaranması ilə başa çatdı. Asiya ölkələrində isə bir qədər spesifik dövlət tipi yaranmışdır. Bu dövlətlərdən biri də 1501-1736-cı illərdə, XVI əsrin əvvəllərindən XVIII əsrin ortalarına qədər mövcud olmuş tarixi Azərbaycan dövləti olan Səfəvilər dövləti idi. XVI əsrin əvvəllərində yaranan Azərbaycan Səfəvi dövləti ərazi və etnik mənsubiyyət baxımından Ağqoyunlu dövlətinin varisi olsa da, ondan xeyli fərqlənirdi. Bu dövlətin yaranması sülalə dəyişikliyi ilə deyil, Azərbaycanda və Yaxın Şərqi qonşu ölkələrində gedən mürəkkəb ictimai-siyasi vəziyyət və iqtisadi proseslərlə bağlı idi. Müxtəlif dövrlərdə dövlətin ərazisi 2 milyon 800 min kv.km, 3 milyon kv.km idi ki, bura indiki Şimali Azərbaycan, Türkiyənin şərq bölgələri, Ermənistan, İran, İraq, Əfqanıstan, Türkmənistan, Qərbi Pakistan və Özbəkistan daxildir. Onu da qeyd edək ki, Şah İsmayıl Xətəinin siyasəti Azərbaycanın şimal və cənub hissələrini birləşdirmək idi. 1501-1514-cü illərdə Şah İsmayıl Xətəinin hərbi-siyasi fəaliyyəti ilə Azərbaycanın şimal və cənub vilayətləri Səfəvilər dövlətinin nisbətən mərkəzləşmiş vahid ərazisinə birləşdirildi.

**Açar sözlər:** *Ağqoyunlu, I Şah İsmayıl, Azərbaycan, Təbriz, Bakı, Karl Marks*

## Introduction

The Safavids, one of the great states of the East, emerged on the site of their predecessors, the Karakoyunlu and Akkoyunlu states. The Safavids also benefited from the help of the Turkish tribes that had brought the Karakoyunlu and Akkoyunlu dynasties to power and came to power by appealing to this social base. The Qizilbash fought for a long time within the borders of the Akkoyunlu state with the aim of coming to power and formed the ideological basis for the establishment of their own state. Even before Ismail came to power, the followers of Sheikh Safieddin Ishaq (1254-1334), Sheikh Junayd (1447-1460) and Sheikh Haydar (1460-1488), with the support of Turks in Azerbaijan, Asia Minor and southern Iran. In the vast territories under the rule of the Akkoyunlu State, they carried out extensive propaganda work among their own tribes, spreading Sufism, thus sanctifying themselves and facilitating their future struggle for power. In this historical period, shortly before the establishment of the Safavid State, i.e. at the end of the 15th century, the Akkoyunlu and Shirvanshahlar states existed in the political geography of Azerbaijan. An important historical moment for the Safavids to gain political power was the occasional palace coups in the state after the death of the Akkoyunlu ruler Sultan Yaqub (1490). At the end of the 15th century, the Aggoyunlu state was on the verge of a historical period of complete disintegration and loss of power due to political strife in various regions of Azerbaijan, feudal fragmentation and increasing influence. The sheikhs of Ardabil had followers outside Azerbaijan. The extent of the activities of these followers in connection with these events in Iran, Iraq, Arabia, Kurdistan and especially Rum (Asia Minor) began to expand. The Safavids, the sheikhs of Ardabil who aspired to political power, were able to exploit this popular movement for their own purposes (Azərbaycan tarixi, 2007, p. 169). After the battle of Shamasi, the loyal Sufi sheikh-emirs of Ardabil hid Ismail for a while in Ardabil and Rasht, and then in Lahijend-Gilan. After six years in Lahijan, Ismail Mirza decided to start the marches. Ismail's main tasks at that time were as follows:

1. Gathering the followers of Safaviyya in a short time.
2. Seizing political power in Azerbaijan.
3. To complete the legacy of their great grandfathers and create a centralized state.

According to sources, at a meeting of Gilzilbash leaders in Erzincan, the question of the direction of the military march was discussed. Some of them, citing a lack of forces, decided to spend the coming winter in Erzincan and wait for additional forces to arrive, and when spring came (1501) they mobilized to Alvan to launch a campaign against Azerbaijan, others to wage jihad in Georgia in the coming winter, and others proposed to go to the region of Kukurshat, where they proposed to spend the winter. But none of these proposals were accepted. With the forces available, it was decided that the main blow should be struck immediately against the Safavids' implacable enemy, Shirvanshah Farrukh Yasar (Azərbaycan Respublikası Daxil İşlər Nazirliyi Polis Akademiyası mühazirə materialları, 2013, p. 47).

## Research

In the actual situation, if Ismail attacked the city of Tabriz directly, a clash with these three enemies, Elvand and Murad Mirza of Akkoyunlu, and even Farrukh Yasar defending them, would be inevitable. As a result, victory would be doubtful. Leading the march, 14-year-old Ismayil himself crossed the difficult crossing of the Kura River, the so-called "Death of the Sheep", on horseback.

Ismail's army crossed the river Kur in December 1500 and turned his reins to Shamakhi. On the way, he was reported that Shirvanshah Farrukhyesar was preparing for battle in Qibla, with 7.000 infantry and 20.000 cavalry". After sending one of his court servants, Quli Beg, to Shirvan to announce the good news of amnesty to the inhabitants, Ismail arrived in Shamakhi, where he learned that Shirvanshah was camped in a forest that lay between the Gulistan fortress and the citadel of Bigharu. Both sides met at Jiyānī near Gulistan and arranged their armies in battle array (Yıldırım, 2008, p. 293). Fight although initially Shirvanshah's troops had the upper hand, Ismayil Mirza's cavalry under the influence of the troops, the Golden Heads gained the advantage. The Shirvan army was defeated and started to flee. Farrukh Yasar ran towards Bugurd fortress, but the Golden Heads caught up with him near Gulistan fortress. Farrukh Yasar's son Ibrahim, who

survived the battle, tried to gather the surviving units of the Shirvan army on the shores of the Caspian Sea, but failed. When Ismail returned to the city of Shamakhi, the city authorities welcomed him with respect (Şirvanşahlar Dərbəndilər sülaləsi dövründə). He went to Mahmudabad in Mughan for the winter. After Shirvan, the next target was Baku, the second capital of the Shirvanshahs, and the Baku fortress refused to pay tribute to Gilzbash's envoys. Ismail sent two units under the command of Muhammad Ustajli and Ilyas Khunushlu to capture Baku. Ghazi Beg, the son of Baku Governor Farrukh Yasar, was preparing for the next battle in the high mountains of Shirvan, so his wife was responsible for the defense and administration of Baku. She rejected the proposals for the surrender of Baku and even executed Baku Darga Abdul Fattah, who had recommended the surrender of the city (Nuriyeva, 2019, p. 139). In the spring of 1501, under the leadership of Gilzbash Ismayil Mirza, the treasury of the Shirvanshahs in Baku was seized. According to Hasan Bey Rumlu, 70 nobles of Baku, in order to protect the townspeople from total destruction,

He came to Ismail with the Koran in his hand and asked him to spare the city. According to an anonymous historian, Ismail ordered an end to the killings and looting, indicating that the struggle continued even after the Golden Heads entered the city. The city's notables (calantars, ghazis and sheikhs) opened the gates of Baku to the Safavids. On Ismail's instructions, Khadim Beg Hulafa, accompanied by representatives of the city authorities, entered the fortress and collected "peshkesh" and "saveri" from the inhabitants in exchange for "sparing their lives". In addition, when Sheikh Junayd was killed by order of Kadim Beg, the body (bones) of Farrukh Yasar's father Shirvanshah Khalil was exhumed and burned. A large amount of gold (money) was found under the tower of his grave (Əfəndiyev, 2007, p. 51).

Although the city of Baku was captured, another center of resistance remained in the Shirvan region. Part of the Shirvan army (1500), which Ismail had defeated near Jabani, continued to resist in the fortresses of Gulistan, Bugurt and Surkhah. Before these fortresses were taken, the movement of the Qizilbash in another direction could pave the way for Shirvan's independence later on. Therefore, after completing the capture of Baku, Ismail Mirza set out with his troops for the Gulistan fortress. However, this expedition did not result in the outcome Ismail Mirza had hoped for. However, the military successes of the Gilzabash warriors led by Ismail in North Azerbaijan made the Akkoyunlu court uneasy. In this context, the news that Alvand Mirza of Akkoyunlu was moving northward from Tabriz with his military forces caused Ismail to suspend the siege of Gulistan fortress. As soon as the news came that the Aggoyunlu march had begun, Ismail summoned the five commanders of the army who were considered the "pillars of the kingdom" – Hussein bey Lala, Garapiri bey Qajar, Muhammad bey Ustachli, Khadim bey Hulefa and Abdi bey Shamlu. – to a military meeting. According to medieval Azerbaijani historians Hasan bey Rumlu and Iskender bey Munshi, Ismayil turned to the golden heads and asked: "What is your wish?" Azerbaijan or Gulistan Fortress?" "We want Azerbaijan," they said. This reaction meant a decision to halt operations in Shirvan and block the Akkoyunlu march. And so it happened (Əliyərli, 2009, p. 367).

In the summer of 1501, in this historically important and decisive battle on the Sharur plain, the Golden Bashids advanced from the vicinity of Nakhchivan to the north of the Araz River without any losses. Killing of Aggoyunlu warlords Karchigay bey, Latif bey, Sidi Gazi bey, Musa bey and Garaja Mahmud bey The Akkoyunlu soldiers panicked and began to flee (Süleymanov, 2018, p. 18). Thus, this historically important battle on the plain of Sharur ended with the victory of the Kılızbaş. The first branch of the Akkoyunlu state fell. This was a historic victory of special importance both in the life of Ismail Mirza and in the history of the Safavid dynasty. Because this victory gave the Safavid dynasty dominance over Azerbaijan. After this victory, in the fall of 1501, Ismail Mirza moved south of Azerbaijan towards Tabriz. In the fall of 1501, Ismail (1501-1524) entered Tabriz in a ceremony, proclaimed himself king, had a khutba read in his name and that of the twelve imams, and minted money in his name according to his instructions. This was one of the signs of belonging to the government. Numismatic materials also prove the existence of various types of inscriptions on coins of this period. "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the

messenger of Allah, Ali is the friend of Allah” was printed on the obverse of the coins (Quliyev, 2011, p. 62). Thus, the Safavid state of Azerbaijan (1501-1736) was established with Tabriz as its capital. The territory of the Safavid state included the lands of South Azerbaijan up to Shirvan, Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Mugan and Kyzyluzen rivers. As a result, Shah Ismail put an end to the rule of Shirvanshahs and Akkoyunlu in Azerbaijan and established a state with strong central authority. Ismail’s military and political activities in 1500-1501 ended the de facto establishment of the Kizilbash state and the Safavid dynasty ruled this historical-political geography for 235 years from 1501 to 1736. This state created the conditions for the cultural and economic development of the country, facilitated the struggle of our people against foreigners.

From the itineraries of Shah Ismail Hatai’s first military campaigns, it is clear that his main goal was to take control of the territory of the Akkoyunlu State.

It happened after the battle of “Sharur” in 1501 in Diyarbakir Alvand Mirza, who had fled, was gathering troops in Erzincan for a new war against Ismail.

In the spring of 1502, when Shah Ismail went to Erzincan to eliminate this threat, Alvand moved towards Tabriz. Hearing this, Shah Ismail turned back and arrived in Tabriz in August 1502. Meanwhile, Alvand Mirza, who was in Ujan, fled to Baghdad via Hamedan. After Alvand Mirza’s fear of what might happen to him was completely dispelled, Shah Ismail I sent one of his henchmen, Kanbar Bey, to Sultan Murad of Akkoyunlu, the owner of Iraq-i Ajem, that is, Iraq-i Arab, in 1503 and offered him to surrender to him. Shah Akkoyunlu had no intention of fighting Murad. However, Murad of Akkoyunlu did not accept Shah’s offer. In this situation, Shah Ismail I moved towards Hamedan with 12,000 soldiers. When he heard about Murad Shah’s march, he prepared an army of 70 thousand men (Əliyarlı, 2009, p. 371).

Shah Ismail did not intend to go to war with Murad Mirza, the head of the other branch of the Akkoyunlu state. Therefore, in the spring of 1503, he sent his disciple Kanber Agha to Murad Mirza and reminded him of his kinship with the Akkoyunlu and offered him a part of Iraq-i Ajem in return. Murad Mirza did not accept this offer. Early in the morning on June 21, 1503, Murad attacked the Safavid army with 10,000 warriors (Süleymanov, 2018, p. 20). In a short time his army was destroyed. Although the victory over Alvand Mirza made Shah Ismail the owner-ruler of Azerbaijan, the defeat of Sultan Murad’s troops resulted in the Yaldizids taking over most of Iran and Iraq-Ajem. Ismail followed Murad into the interior of Iran. He captured the unresisting city of Shiraz. With this victory, the dominance of the Bayanduri dynasty, the second branch of the Akkoyunlu State, ended with the Battle of Almabulagi. After this historic victory, Shah Ismail captured Qom, Kashan and Isfahan, followed by Yazd and Kirman in 1504. All of Iran and Arabia except Khorasan in 1508-1510 he conquered Iraq and united it under his rule (İsmayılov, 2017, pp. 131-132). Thus, the Safavid state bordered the Shaybani state in the east and the Ottoman Empire in the west.

As a result of Shah Ismail’s centralization policy, the Safavids became an empire with a voice in the world. However, Karl Marx, the founder of the ideology of communism, characterized Shah Ismail as an “invading conqueror”. Karl Marx writes that he, Shah Ismail, occupied 14 provinces during his 14 years in power (Azərbaycanın dövlətçilik tarixində Səfəvilər dövlətinin yeri, 2001, p. 121).

However, Karl Marx overlooks the fact that Ismail came to power at the age of 14 and was able to inscribe his name among important historical figures. Moreover, he was not engaged in barbarism, but in the beautification of Azerbaijan by uniting its divided lands and provinces into a single state.

### Conclusion

From our research, we conclude that Ismail’s military-political campaign in 1500-1501 ended the de-facto establishment of the Safavid state, and the Safavid dynasty ruled this historical-political geography for 235 years between 1501-1736. From the early 16th century to the mid-18th century, the powerful Safavid state of Azerbaijan, which emerged in Iran, was one of the most glorious periods of our medieval history and was a state that could coexist and compete. It was a Turkish

state that was able to do so with the powerful states of the Near and Middle East, the Ottomans, the Great Mongols and the Shaybani states. The creation of an independent, sovereign and centralized Safavid-Kizilbash state created a fertile ground for the economic, political and cultural development of Azerbaijan and the establishment of international relations. Especially during the reign of the first Safavid ruler, Azerbaijan strengthened the power of the Safavid state and the goal of creating a strong centralized Azerbaijani state was set as the main task for his successors. Shah Ismayil Khatai, the founder of the Safavid State, ascended the throne at the age of 14 and established a state in the Near and Middle East that made a global impact and earned him a worthy place among the world conquerors.

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