

## Historical-Demographic Dynamics of Medieval Azerbaijan: A Comparative Historiographical Examination of Population Structure, Ethnicity, Migration, and Socio-Political Transformations

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### Abstract

In recent decades, demographic history has emerged as a critical field for understanding long-term socio-political and economic developments within complex societies. Global processes—ranging from climate change and land degradation to increasing pressure on natural resources and rising food insecurity—have intensified scholarly interest in historical population dynamics as a foundation for contemporary demographic theories. While significant attention has been devoted to demographic transitions in Europe and the Islamic world, the historical-demographic trajectory of the Azerbaijani lands during the Middle Ages remains comparatively under-researched in international scholarship. This study conducts a comprehensive historiographical analysis of Azerbaijani demographic realities in the medieval era by examining works produced by Azerbaijani, Turkish, Persian, Russian, and Western historians. It investigates key dimensions such as population size and density, ethno-linguistic composition, urban and rural settlement structure, migratory patterns, socio-economic transformations, and state-level demographic policies. By situating medieval Azerbaijani demography within the broader Eurasian geopolitical and cultural context, the research highlights the dynamic interplay between nomadic and settled populations, the impact of trade and warfare on population movements, and the influence of Islamic legal-ethical thought on family structure and fertility trends. The analysis demonstrates that medieval demographic thought in Azerbaijan evolved at the intersection of Islamic social philosophy, Turkic cultural traditions, and regional geopolitical realities. Unlike certain Western medieval philosophies which viewed population expansion as a potential cause of scarcity and social instability, scholars of the medieval Muslim East perceived population growth as a divine blessing and a driver of social vitality and economic productivity. The study concludes that medieval demographic processes in Azerbaijan played a foundational role in shaping the region's ethno-political identity, settlement geography, and cultural continuity.

**Keywords:** *Historical demography; medieval Azerbaijan; population dynamics; ethno-linguistic composition; migration; settlement structure; Islamic socio-philosophical thought; historiography; Eurasian history; Turkic-Islamic civilization..*

### Introduction

This research employs comparative historiographical analysis, integrating primary sources including medieval Muslim historiography, chronicles, legal texts, religious writings, and travel accounts. Secondary literature from Azerbaijani, Turkish, Russian, Persian, and Western historians is also examined. A thematic and interdisciplinary approach combining population studies, socio-economic history, and sociology was implemented to reconstruct demographic patterns and intellectual discourses.

### Introduction

In recent decades, global challenges such as climate change, the reduction of arable land, diminishing freshwater resources, threats to food security, and the continual expansion of human settlements have intensified scholarly interest in the study of demographic processes and their historical trajectories. Throughout all periods of human history, individuals have been, either directly or indirectly, participants in demographic dynamics. From this perspective, the study of demographic history is not

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limited to understanding population trends alone, but also offers insight into the broader socio-political, socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual development of societies (Aliyev Sh., 2025). Human history itself can be understood as a continuous demographic process, shaped by successive generations whose reproduction and lived experiences have collectively contributed to the evolution of civilization (Mursaqliyev M., Aliyeva S., Najafov Sh., 2025). The present article aims to explore how demographic processes in the medieval period have been analyzed in the works of Azerbaijani and Western historians.

Even in the earliest stages of human history, considerable attention was devoted to understanding the role of demographic factors in shaping societal development. Classical philosophers and thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, articulated early notions regarding the optimal balance between population growth and the availability of natural resources. Their ideas also emphasized the necessity of state regulation in managing population expansion and territorial settlement (Najaf A.N., Najafov R., 2025). In the Eastern intellectual tradition, concerns about the relationship between population density, settlement patterns, and societal well-being emerged as early as the 6th to 3rd centuries BC. In ancient China, for example, philosophers such as Confucius engaged with the question of how to maintain equilibrium between population growth and the availability of arable land, highlighting the significance of demographic considerations in the governance and sustainability of society. Confucius, recognizing the societal consequences of demographic imbalance, proposed the concept of an “optimal population.” He maintained that deviations from this ideal ratio could lead to adverse outcomes in social life. As a solution, he advocated for the state-led relocation of populations from densely populated regions to less inhabited areas, viewing this as an effective mechanism for the purposeful regulation of both population size and spatial distribution (Najafov Sh., Hajiyeva G., 2025). Demographic thought continued to evolve during the Middle Ages. In the later stages of feudal development, several Western philosophers and thinkers began to express concern over the negative consequences of unchecked population growth. They argued that the rate of population increase often outpaced the availability of subsistence resources, thereby contributing to social inequality and widespread poverty. In contrast, thinkers in the medieval Muslim East approached the issue of population growth from a different philosophical and theological perspective. Drawing on religious sources such as Quran, Verse 6:151 – “*Do not associate anything with Him, and be kind to parents, do not kill your children for fear of poverty*” – Eastern scholars emphasized procreation as a core value within the family structure. Within this framework, population growth was not perceived as inherently conflicting with the availability of natural resources. Rather, it was seen as compatible with divine providence and societal flourishing, suggesting a more optimistic view of the relationship between human reproduction and material sustenance.

### **Historiographical contributions of Rauf Mammadov to medieval Azerbaijani demography**

Historical sources attest to the fact that Azerbaijan has been a densely populated region since antiquity and has long been recognized for its rich and developed urban culture. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the scarcity of statistical data that could serve as reliable indirect evidence concerning the demographic structure of medieval Azerbaijan. In this context, Rauf Mammadov, in his monograph *Cities of Northern Azerbaijan in the 7th–14th centuries*, highlights the methodological challenges inherent in reconstructing historical population figures. He states: “*Due to the lack of statistical data on the number of urban population of Azerbaijan in the 10th–12th centuries, the population of cities is determined mainly based on fragmentary data from narrative sources, as well as information on the number of residential houses*” (Mammadov, 2015, 184). In this monograph, the author endeavors to reconstruct the demographic profile of medieval Azerbaijani cities through an interdisciplinary approach that extends beyond historiographical and source-critical methods. Notably, the study incorporates a comparative analysis of archaeological materials, which are regarded as tangible representations of pre-literate material culture. Of particular interest is the author’s methodological framework for estimating the spatial extent of medieval urban settlements. He emphasizes a scientific approach grounded in archaeological practice, stating: “*According to the calculations of archaeologists conducting excavations in medieval cities, the area occupied by public buildings, markets, streets, etc., is subtracted from the total area enclosed within the city walls (Based on archaeological experience, it is generally estimated that, on average, 2 hectares are allocated to such public infrastructure for every 9 hectares of urban area)*” (Mammadov, 2015, 185). Within this context, the author asserts that approximately 70 hectares of the 91-hectare urban territory of Shamakhi during the period in question were occupied by residential structures. Citing the research of I. Jafarzadeh, the author further estimates that the population of Shamakhi at that time reached approximately 45,500 inhabitants (Mammadov, 2015, 185). British medievalist David Nicholas in *The*

*Growth of the Medieval City* also uses archaeological evidence, housing density, and urban boundaries to reconstruct population sizes (Nicholas, 1997, 45-60), much like Rauf Mammadov. Western urban demography, especially in England and France, benefits from more comprehensive tax and parish records (e.g., *Domesday Book*), whereas Azerbaijani sources are more fragmented and rely on indirect archaeological estimates.

### **Ziya Bunyadov: Ethnolinguistic formation and historical continuity**

In examining Azerbaijani historiography of the medieval period during the second half of the 20th century, particular attention must be paid to the work of the eminent historian and academician Ziya Bunyadov, whose contributions significantly shaped the scholarly discourse on the ethno-linguistic history of Azerbaijan. In his seminal monograph *Azerbaijan in the 7th–8th Centuries*, Bunyadov addresses the complex and long-debated issue of the Turkification of the Azerbaijani population. He writes: “*The issue of the Turkification of the Azerbaijani population, the clarification of the beginning of this process that has been going on for years, is very complex, and this issue has not been resolved yet. It would be wrong to accept, as some researchers do, that Turkification took place in the 11th–12th centuries. It is also wrong to consider the Turks as an element that came to the territory of Azerbaijan from outside, because in this case, the existence of local large and very compact Turkic tribal formations is overlooked*” (Bunyadov, 1989). Unlike certain prevailing views in historical scholarship that portray the Turkic presence in Azerbaijan as a result of later migratory influxes, Bunyadov challenges this notion and argues for a more nuanced interpretation grounded in the existence of indigenous Turkic-speaking communities from antiquity (Aliyeva S.; Mursaguliyev M.; Najafov Sh., 2025).

Bundayov asserts that it is methodologically and historically more accurate to conceptualize Azerbaijan as a territory historically inhabited by Turkic ethnic groups. Expanding on this thesis, he states: “*The process of Turkification began only after the assimilation of the Turkic aborigines as a result of the mixing of the Oghuzs from the south and the Kipchaks from the north, and gradually accelerated, ending in the 11th–12th centuries, resulting in the formation of the modern Azerbaijani people in the territory of Azerbaijan and Arran*” (Bunyadov, 1989, 171). Author highlights the settlement of a wide array of ethnolinguistic groups in Azerbaijan as a distinctive characteristic of the region’s historical development. This ethnocultural diversity, according to Bunyadov, played a critical role in shaping the demographic and linguistic trajectory of the Azerbaijani population. Notably, he argues that this diversity functioned as a barrier against the complete Arabization of the local population during the period of Arab domination. Addressing the condition of the Caucasian Albanians under the rule of the Arab Caliphate, Bunyadov writes: “*It is possible that part of the Arran population (Albanians) underwent Arabization very quickly and mingled with the Arabs, and later, after the arrival of the Seljuk Turks, they underwent Turkization together with the Arabs*” (Bunyadov, 1989, 171; Amrahov: 2022, 8). Through this interpretation, Bunyadov not only repositions the narrative of Turkification within a broader historical and ethno-cultural continuum but also contributes significantly to the understanding of the formation of Azerbaijani ethnogenesis as a complex, multi-layered, and regionally embedded process. British historian Patrick Geary emphasizes that medieval “ethnic” groups were fluid and politically constructed—echoing Bunyadov’s argument that Turkification was gradual and not purely migratory (Geary, 2002, 80-98). Geary stress ideological and linguistic assimilation under elite pressure, while Bunyadov foregrounds indigenous Turkic presence and bottom-up ethno-linguistic continuity. Bruce Trigger’s studies of indigenous Canadian groups emphasize long-term continuity and integration, would be a useful comparison with Bunyadov’s treatment of local Turkic groups as foundational rather than external (Trigger, 1976, 85-102).

### **Mammadali Sharifli: Tribal settlement and integration**

Among the notable scholars contributing to Azerbaijani historical studies in the second half of the 20th century is Mammadali Sharifli, whose research is distinguished by its methodological rigor and engagement with primary sources. His monograph, *Azerbaijani Feudal States in the Second Half of the 9th Century–11th Century*, represents a significant scholarly contribution. Based extensively on primary Arabic and Persian sources, the work provides a comprehensive and empirically grounded analysis of the socio-economic and socio-political structures of Azerbaijan during the specified period. A key focus of Sharifli’s investigation is the question of population demography and patterns of tribal settlement. Drawing on historical accounts, he examines the dynamics of tribal movements into the region. For instance, he cites the 10th-century Arab historian al-Masudi, who reported that as early as the 6th century, a number of fortifications and dams were constructed in the Caucasus Mountains, prompting the resettlement of certain tribes to the area. This resettlement was purportedly linked to strategic defensive measures aimed at protecting the region from incursions by external groups such as the

Khazars, Turks, and Sarir: "The famous historian of the 10th century, Masudi, notes that as early as the 6th century, a number of fortifications were built in the Caucasus Mountains, dams were built, and in connection with this, some tribes were relocated to this region, which consisted of protecting them from attacks by the Khazar, Turk, Sarir, etc. tribes here" (Sharifli, 1978, 34-35). Following this citation, Sharifli provides his interpretative commentary, emphasizing the indigenous character of many of these groups: "most of these tribes were local tribes that had lived here since ancient times" (Sharifli, 1978, 35).

Mammadali Sharifli offers a detailed explanation of the historical migration and settlement patterns of numerous Turkic tribes in Azerbaijan, emphasizing their integration with pre-existing Turkic-speaking populations. He attributes this process of assimilation not only to shared ethno-linguistic affinities but also to the region's favorable geographical and strategic characteristics. As he notes: "The main reason for the presence of various tribes in the Shirvan territory in the 10th century should be explained by the fact that this country is suitable for living, has military-strategic importance, the tribes passing from north to south and from south to north settled here, and a number of other historical factors" (Sharifli, 1978). According to Sharifli, such factors facilitated the settlement of a large number of ethnically and linguistically diverse groups in both the Caucasus and Azerbaijan. To substantiate his claims, he draws upon a range of primary sources, including the 10th-century geographer Ibn Hawqal, who provides a vivid account of the region's extraordinary linguistic diversity: "The most accurate information about the tribes living in the Caucasus Mountains and their languages is provided by Ibn Hawqal. He writes that, according to what is said, the population living in the Caucasus Mountains speaks three hundred and sixty languages, which I previously denied until I myself saw many cities and found that local languages other than Turkish (Azerbaijani) and Persian existed in each of these cities" (Sharifli, 1978, 35-36).

American historian Peter Heather's work on Gothic migrations parallels Sharifli's view that tribal migration was both military and ecological. He too rejects a "barbarian invasion" model for one of gradual, negotiated settlement (Heather, 2005, 210-230). Western scholars typically emphasize written administrative records and charters (e.g., Capitulary of Charlemagne), while Sharifli relies more heavily on Arabic geographers and oral/linguistic sources. The use of Ibn Hawqal resembles how English historians rely on Arab sources like al-Idrisi for Andalusian demography.

Sharifli maintains that various Turkic-speaking and non-Turkic groups played an active and formative role in the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani people. He underscores that this complex process is not only reflected in the cultural and linguistic landscape but also in the toponymy of the region: "Most of these tribes were mixed and assimilated into the Azerbaijani people, who was still forming from the 10th–11th centuries. Some of them have retained their characteristics and language to this day. For example, only the names of the Khazars, Albanians, Zikhs, Shekin, Dudayns and other tribes or the names of cities, villages, mountains and places associated with their names have remained" (Sharifli, 1978, 35-36). Through such analysis, Sharifli contributes significantly to the scholarly understanding of the demographic and cultural foundations of Azerbaijan, offering an interpretation grounded in primary historical testimony and sensitive to the complexities of regional ethnogenesis.

### **Jafar Ibrahimov: Warfare, economic disparity, and population stability**

Azerbaijani historian Jafar Ibrahimov, in his monograph *Feudal States on the Territory of Azerbaijan in the 15th Century*, offered a critical appraisal of the state of medieval studies in the historiography of his time. He noted the limited scholarly engagement with the socio-economic structures of 15th-century Azerbaijan, stating: "In modern historiography, the socio-economic structure of Azerbaijan in the 15th century has not been studied, with the exception of I. Petrushevsky's work" (Ibrahimov, 1962, 17-18). Through a critical engagement with a broad corpus of historiographical and primary sources, Ibrahimov sought to reconstruct the socio-political landscape of this pivotal century – a period marked by intense political turbulence and transformation. Of particular importance is his analysis of the consequences of the protracted military conflict between Amir Temur and the Golden Horde Khan Tokhtamysh in the late 14th century. Ibrahimov emphasizes that this conflict, driven by struggles for control over Azerbaijan, resulted in widespread devastation across urban and rural settlements, including the destruction of infrastructure such as roads. He argues that the aftermath of this warfare had a profound and lasting impact on the socio-economic conditions of the region, impeding both the mechanical and natural population growth of its inhabitants (Ibrahimov, 1962, 21).

Furthermore, Ibrahimov addresses several aspects of socio-economic development that hold considerable relevance for historical demographic analysis. Drawing upon the testimonies of contemporary travelers and historians, he contends that economic conditions across Azerbaijan in the 15th century were markedly uneven. This observation underscores the regional disparities in economic

activity, which he attributes to both the political fragmentation of the period and the differential impact of external invasions and internal strife (Ibrahimov, 1962, 53).

Drawing upon the account of the Venetian traveler Ambrogio Contarini, who visited Shirvan in 1475, Jafar Ibrahimov highlights significant regional disparities in socio-economic development within 15th-century Azerbaijan. According to both contemporary travelers and historians cited in the work, the northern regions of Azerbaijan – particularly Shirvan – demonstrated a markedly higher level of economic development compared to the southern territories. Contarini attributed this divergence, in part, to the persistent and destructive conflicts between the rival states of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu, whose military confrontations dominated much of the 15th century. These incessant wars rendered the southern regions vulnerable to repeated devastation, while the relative stability of Shirvan allowed for sustained economic growth. Ibrahimov offers a compelling analysis of the socio-economic consequences of this prolonged conflict. He notes that the southern part of Azerbaijan suffered disproportionately from famine, violence, and socio-political instability, all of which severely undermined its economic foundations. In contrast, the northern territories – particularly Shirvan – exhibited signs of urban prosperity and agricultural productivity. As Ibrahimov recounts: “*Contarini evaluates Shamakhi as a wealthy city, and Shirvan as a land with productive and fertile lands. Contarini was also amazed by the fact that prices, especially food prices, were much lower in Shirvan compared to the southern part of Azerbaijan*” (Ibrahimov, 1962, 54).

From a historical-demographic perspective, the presence of flourishing urban centers, along with stable market conditions and low food prices, may be interpreted as key indicators of material well-being and population stability. In this context, it is plausible to infer a relatively favorable trajectory of demographic development in northern Azerbaijan during this period – especially when contrasted with the south, where continuous warfare and socioeconomic dislocation would have negatively impacted both natural and mechanical population growth. Ibrahimov himself underscores the extent of political instability that shaped this era, observing that between the fall of the Ilkhanid state and the end of the 15th century – a span of approximately 165 years – only 75 years were marked by relative peace, while the remaining 90 years were characterized by persistent conflict and political fragmentation. This observation further supports his broader thesis regarding the divergent developmental trajectories of the northern and southern regions of Azerbaijan under conditions of protracted warfare.

Barbara Tuchman show that warfare in 14th–15th century Europe (Hundred Years’ War, War of the Roses) caused regional depopulation, migration, and price fluctuation (Tuchman, 1978, 340) – mirroring Ibrahimov’s conclusions on Azerbaijan. Christopher Dyer’s work on medieval England (Dyer, 2002, 250-280) shows how northern English towns lagged economically behind southern centers – much like Shirvan vs. southern Azerbaijan in Ibrahimov’s account.

### **Yagub Mahmudov: Diplomatic narratives and family structure**

In his scholarly work *Unstudied Pages*, the famous Azerbaijani historian Yagub Mahmudov devotes considerable attention to the narratives of European travelers, using these external perspectives to illuminate the geopolitical, diplomatic, and socio-cultural history of the Azerbaijani Aq Qoyunlu state (Mahmudov, 1972). In particular, Mahmudov offers a comprehensive examination of the state’s resistance to foreign incursions and its engagement in multifaceted diplomatic relations with various polities, including European powers. His analysis brings to light critical episodes in the political history of the period, especially those concerning key figures such as Uzun Hasan – one of the era’s most notable military and political leaders – and Sara Khatun, widely recognized as the first female diplomat in Azerbaijani history. The monograph also provides valuable ethnographic insight into the everyday life, customs, and social practices of the Azerbaijani people during the 15th century. For example, Mahmudov highlights cultural exchanges that occurred through diplomatic channels, as reflected in matrimonial traditions among the elite. He notes: “...At that time, even in Azerbaijan, it was fashionable for wealthy families to give a Venetian mirror when giving away a girl” (Mahmudov, 1972, 26).

Such references not only illustrate the extent of cross-cultural contact but also serve as important indicators of material culture and the diffusion of European goods into Azerbaijani society. Of particular relevance to historical demography are the passages in which Mahmudov discusses the values surrounding family formation and marriage. According to the author, Azerbaijani families historically prioritized the selection of brides on the basis of moral character and intellect – qualities held in high esteem within the social fabric of the time. One notable anecdote cited by Mahmudov involves Uzun Hasan’s interaction with the captured Emperor of Trebizond. When the emperor inquired about the price of his ransom, Uzun Hasan is reported to have responded: “*The man I desire has fallen into my hands.*

*I do not value him with money. It is said that you have an intelligent and good-natured daughter named Feodora. Marry her to me.*" When the Emperor protested, "How can I do this when we are Christians and you are pagans?" Uzun Hasan replied, "It does not bother me" (Mahmudov, 1972, 26). Thereafter, Feodora was sent to the Aq Qoyunlu court. This account, though diplomatically significant, also reflects broader societal attitudes toward women, intercultural marriage, and the symbolic role of women in the continuity of familial and dynastic legitimacy. Mahmudov interprets such historical episodes as evidence of a longstanding Azerbaijani cultural ethos that values multiculturalism, religious tolerance, and deep respect for women – regardless of ethnic or religious origin. In his view, women have traditionally been regarded not only as central figures in the family unit but also as embodiments of its moral integrity and inviolability.

Natalie Zemon Davis and Barbara Hanawalt have also emphasized the symbolic and political dimensions of noble marriages (Davis, 2000; Hanawalt, 1986). Cross-cultural gift exchange is analyzed by Canadian historian Natalie Zemon Davis as a way of managing diplomacy – similar to the Venetian mirror Mahmudov describes (Davis, 2000; 56-88). Mahmudov's account of Uzun Hasan and Feodora echoes Western courtly love narratives and Christian-Muslim dynastic marriages, such as those involving Andalusian emirs and Christian monarchs.

In his monograph *Unstudied Pages*, academician Yagub Mahmudov offers a detailed analysis of the economic transformation of the Aq Qoyunlu state during the reign of Uzun Hasan. Mahmudov emphasizes that, upon Uzun Hasan's ascension to power, the state, despite its considerable territorial expanse, was in a state of economic and political weakness. The author notes: "When he came to power, the Aq Qoyunlu state, although extensive in terms of territory, was not very strong economically and politically. The general economic progress in the territory of the Aq Qoyunlu state, which was often attacked and robbed by foreigners, was disrupted. The level of development of agriculture was particularly low" (Mahmudov, 1972, 45).

Prior to the implementation of Uzun Hasan's reforms, the population endured an excessive and burdensome taxation regime, consisting of no fewer than 31 distinct levies, alongside numerous corvée obligations. This overtaxation, coupled with a lack of political stability and the autonomy of militarized feudal elites who resisted central authority, posed a significant threat to state cohesion and sustainability. From a historical-demographic perspective, such conditions were detrimental to both natural and mechanical population growth. Political fragmentation and continuous inter-feudal conflicts disrupted agricultural production and food distribution networks, contributing to elevated levels of child mortality and general demographic stagnation. Mahmudov underscores that Uzun Hasan, as a visionary and pragmatic statesman, was acutely aware of the interdependence between the stability of the state and the socio-economic welfare of its population. Recognizing the necessity of securing a dependable, sedentary tax base, he initiated a series of institutional and legal reforms aimed at consolidating state power and improving the livelihood of his subjects. As Mahmudov writes: "Unlike the rulers before him, Uzun Hasan understood the need to rely on the sedentary population. Therefore, in order to strengthen the Aq Qoyunlu state economically and politically, he had the "Code of Laws" (Qanunname) prepared, which later became known as the "Laws of Hasan the Sultan" and remained in force even in the 16th century. According to this "Code of Laws", taxes to be collected from the peasants were determined and specified, the tax system was relatively simplified. The arbitrariness of tax-collecting officials decreased" (Mahmudov, 1972, 46).

The promulgation of this legal code marked a turning point in the economic trajectory of the Aq Qoyunlu state. By regulating taxation and curbing bureaucratic abuses, Uzun Hasan's reforms revitalized the productive forces within society, particularly among the peasantry and artisan classes. Mahmudov concludes that: "The laws of Uzun Hasan significantly revitalized the productive forces in the country, and taxes collected from peasants and artisans were ensured to flow directly to the treasury. The state was significantly strengthened economically" (Mahmudov, 1972, 46). This analysis not only sheds light on the mechanisms of early state-building in Azerbaijan but also illustrates how enlightened governance and administrative rationalization can catalyze economic development and demographic resilience in a historically volatile context.

#### **Abdulkarim Alizadeh: Mongol-era disruptions and socio-economic collapse**

One of the most substantive contributions to the study of Azerbaijan's medieval history is the monograph by the eminent historian Abdulkarim Alizadeh, entitled *The Socio-Economic and Political History of Azerbaijan in the 13th–14th Centuries* (Alizadeh, 1956). This work represents a foundational analysis of the profound transformations that occurred in Azerbaijan as a result of the Mongol invasions

and the subsequent rule of Mongol successor states. Alizadeh carefully examines the far-reaching consequences of the military campaigns conducted by both the Mongol Empire and its post-imperial formations – particularly the political rivalry between the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanids (Hulagids) – which often unfolded on Azerbaijani territory.

Alizadeh underscores the deleterious impact of incessant warfare on the region's socio-economic infrastructure and the living conditions of its inhabitants. He writes: *“Due to the continuous continuation of military operations in the territory of Northern Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani population had to bear the heavy burden of war on both sides. Cities and villages were destroyed and laid waste, agricultural lands were trampled and destroyed, and architectural monuments were razed to the ground”* (Alizadeh, 1956, 329). The historian emphasizes that it was the civilian population that bore the brunt of these repeated military confrontations. The disruption of daily life, coupled with the destruction of productive land and cultural infrastructure, had dire consequences not only for the social status of the population but also for demographic sustainability. He notes: *“The local population was either exterminated or fled the country with their heads held high. Part of the population was hiding in the mountains and forests”* (Alizadeh, 1956, 329).

Alizadeh's analysis leads him to a stark yet historically grounded conclusion: that the cumulative effect of prolonged military occupation and internal strife was nothing short of catastrophic for Northern Azerbaijan. He writes: *“All this led to the disappearance of cities and villages, the decline of trade, and the collapse of the economy of Northern Azerbaijan”* (Alizadeh, 1956, 329). Through a rigorous use of primary sources and a methodical approach to socio-economic analysis, Alizadeh presents a sobering picture of the profound dislocation experienced by Azerbaijani society during this period. His work remains an essential reference for understanding the demographic and economic consequences of foreign invasions and internal political fragmentation in medieval Azerbaijan.

Abdulkarim Alizadeh, drawing upon a wide range of historical sources, underscores the extent of societal breakdown during the Mongol invasions and subsequent political turmoil in Azerbaijan. He notes that the severity of insecurity reached such a level that segments of the Azerbaijani population ceased agricultural activity altogether, with some even contemplating or resorting to suicide as an escape from their unbearable conditions. Such statements poignantly underscore the catastrophic deterioration of public security and socio-economic stability. As Alizadeh presents it, the loss of basic livelihood and personal safety had direct and profound consequences for the demographic profile of the region during the 13th and 14th centuries, reflecting a period of extreme demographic crisis and disintegration of settled life. Alizadeh's work thus provides a comprehensive and empirically grounded analysis of how political instability and military violence shaped the socio-economic and demographic landscape of medieval Azerbaijan. With meticulous attention to detail and an extensive use of factual material, his monograph convincingly illustrates the close interrelationship between external invasions, internal political fragmentation, and the deterioration of the population's living standards. Notably, Alizadeh's research continues to be a foundational reference for scholars of medieval Azerbaijani history. For instance, Jafar Ibrahimov, in his monograph *Feudal States on the Territory of Azerbaijan in the 15th Century*, explicitly draws upon Alizadeh's findings when discussing the socio-economic conditions of the Azerbaijani population in the transitional period from the 14th to the 15th centuries. Ibrahimov writes: *“If we look at the political situation of Azerbaijan at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries, then we must definitely note that, as a result of the Mongol rule in Azerbaijan in the 13th and 14th centuries, the country's economy declined, and the urban and rural population fell into a state of extreme poverty and beggarly destitution...”* (Ibrahimov, 1962, 19). This citation highlights the significant scholarly impact of Alizadeh's analysis and affirms the centrality of his work in understanding the longue durée of economic decline and demographic destabilization in Azerbaijan following the Mongol conquests.

American historian William McNeill links Mongol campaigns to not only warfare but also pandemic transmission – relevant for understanding demographic shock in Azerbaijan (McNeill, 1977, 112-134). Historians like Michael Dols and David Morgan confirm that Mongol destruction in Central Asia had long-term demographic consequences (Dols, 1977, 45; Morgan, 1986, 90-130) – Alizadeh's conclusions match theirs in scope and tone. Alizadeh's insights on internal dislocation parallel Marc Bloch's descriptions of rural abandonment in France after Viking raids and feudal wars (Bloch, 1961, 210-240).

### **Abulhasan Rahmani: Safavid–Ottoman conflicts and forced migration**

The monograph of the distinguished scholar Abulhasan Rahmani, *Azerbaijan at the End of the 16th Century – the 17th Century* (1590–1700s), represents a significant contribution to the historiography of medieval Azerbaijan, particularly in the context of historical demography and socio-economic development. As a meticulous specialist in Persian-language sources, Rahmani employs a wide array of archival and narrative materials to reconstruct the political, economic, and cultural transformations that shaped Azerbaijani society during this tumultuous period. Rahmani's work is of particular importance for its rigorous analysis of the long-lasting Safavid–Ottoman conflict and its devastating consequences for the population of Azerbaijan. Drawing upon contemporary sources, the author offers an empirically grounded and analytically rich portrait of the socio-economic landscape, emphasizing the scale of destruction inflicted upon major urban centers and rural settlements alike. According to Rahmani, the prolonged warfare-lasting over a century-reduced several major cities, including Tabriz, Nakhchivan, and Ganja, to ruins. In addition to military devastation, he documents the large-scale forced migrations orchestrated by Shah Abbas I, which had profound consequences for the demographic stability of the region. These displacements were frequently accompanied by social upheaval, economic dislocation, and administrative coercion in the new areas of settlement.

Citing primary sources, Rahmani vividly illustrates the suffering endured by Azerbaijani migrants. Referring to Jalal al-Din Muhammad Yezdi's account, he writes: "Jalaluddin Muhammad Yezdi describes the situation of Azerbaijani immigrants living in Isfahan at the beginning of the last decades of the 16th century: 'Due to the very bad behavior of the people of Tabriz, a decree was issued on their mass massacres. However, after their pleas for pardon, they were advised to pay four thousand tumans without the participation of the merchants, and only after this payment should they know their place'" (Rahmani, 1981, 240). This passage reflects the extent to which the displaced populations from Azerbaijan were subjected not only to spatial dislocation but also to economic extortion, humiliation, and exclusion from commercial life in their new settlements.

Rahmani's monograph may also be viewed as a chronological and thematic continuation of earlier foundational works on the socio-economic history of medieval Azerbaijan. His nuanced and source-based reconstruction of everyday life in the late Safavid period offers key insights into the conditions that directly shaped demographic trends. The author devotes particular attention to the relationship between military conflict, economic crisis, and population decline (Najafov, 2025). Discussing the wider consequences of the Safavid-Ottoman wars, he notes that the famine initiated during the reign of Shah Abbas I extended far beyond Azerbaijan, affecting vast territories from Istanbul to Tabriz and from Baghdad to Damirgapi (Iron Gate). Rahmani presents this episode as emblematic of the broader systemic instability of the time – where war, displacement, and famine together produced severe demographic pressures. In sum, *Azerbaijan at the End of the 16th Century – the 17th Century* constitutes an essential resource for understanding the complex interplay between warfare, state policy, and population movements in early modern Azerbaijani history. Through his critical use of Persian-language chronicles and his attention to socio-economic structures, Rahmani offers a comprehensive and methodologically robust study of how macro-political events shaped the demographic realities of the period.

### **Ogtay Efendiye: State formation and structural fragility in early Safavid Azerbaijan**

Azerbaijani historians have frequently incorporated the observations of European travelers as valuable primary sources in their scholarly investigations of Azerbaijan's past. These travelers, who visited the region across various historical periods, often provided detailed and insightful accounts of Azerbaijan's geographical, political, and socio-economic conditions. Owing to its strategic geographic location at the crossroads of major empires and its abundance of natural resources, Azerbaijan consistently attracted the attention of foreign observers. Their narratives, therefore, constitute an important corpus of external documentation that complements indigenous historiographical traditions. In this context, Professor Ogtay Efendiye occupies a prominent place in Azerbaijani historiography, particularly his extensive studies on the early Safavid period. His monograph, *The Formation of the Safavid State of Azerbaijan at the Beginning of the 16th Century*, remains a foundational work for understanding the initial challenges faced by the nascent Safavid state. In it, Efendiye notes the methodological limitations inherent in the primary sources of the period, particularly with regard to the socio-economic condition of the lower classes and general populace. He writes: "The vagueness of the information in the primary sources does not allow us to clearly describe the situation of the working masses and subjects in the period in question. ... It should be noted that Shah Ismail I could not cope with the task of creating a central state" (Efendiye, 1961).

Efendiyev's analysis highlights the structural fragility of the early Safavid state, particularly the decentralization of political authority. He emphasizes that the lack of subordination among the Qizilbash tribal leaders to the central administration, as well as the continuous internecine rivalries among these factions, significantly hindered efforts at state consolidation (Najaf, 2025). Furthermore, he provides a factually grounded examination of the broader impact of the Ottoman–Safavid conflicts on urban development and demographic trends. He notes that: "...External, non-economic factors also contributed to the rise or decline of cities. Sometimes they were of no small importance for their subsequent existence. Among them, one can mention the Safavid-Ottoman wars (1514, 1533, 1578–1590), feudal conflicts, famine, epidemics, etc" (Efendiyev, 1961). Efendiyev's research presents a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted crises that confronted the Safavid state in its formative years, where military confrontation, internal tribal unrest, and environmental and epidemiological factors collectively exacerbated the already precarious socio-economic conditions.

Similar to early Capetian France or Plantagenet England, early Safavid Azerbaijan lacked centralized authority – parallels with British historians' work on medieval kingship (Morris, 2008, 180–210; Carpenter, 2003, 140–170). Like Efendiyev, British historian Mark Bailey shows that famine and plague often struck alongside political instability, further accelerating population loss (Bailey, 2014, 45–75). Safavid-Qizilbash tensions reflect the struggles described by American historian Joseph Strayer about military nobility resisting centralized monarchies (Strayer, 1970).

### **Karim Shukurov: Archival sources and demographic reconstruction**

One of the most significant contributions to contemporary Azerbaijani historiography concerning the demographic development of the medieval Azerbaijani population is the monograph *The Population of Azerbaijan: History and Sources of Study* by Karim Shukurov. In this comprehensive work, the author undertakes a rigorous and methodologically grounded analysis of the historical trajectory of demographic processes in Azerbaijan, spanning from antiquity to the present day. The study is firmly rooted in a wide array of primary and secondary sources, reflecting a commitment to scholarly objectivity. Of particular relevance is a subsection in Part II of the "Appendices," titled "Systematized Lists of Archival and Published Materials on Demographic Statistical Sources," which includes a section entitled "On the 'Population Censuses' Conducted in Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages." Despite the severe limitations posed by the scarcity of statistical documentation pertaining to urban populations in medieval Azerbaijani cities, Shukurov succeeds in offering a compelling and analytically sophisticated examination of the available material (Shukurov, 2004, 650–652).

### **Conclusion**

This article has demonstrated that the historiographical study of Azerbaijan's medieval demographical situation is marked by a dynamic interplay of interdisciplinary methodologies, critical source analysis, and evolving theoretical frameworks. By systematically surveying the contributions of key Azerbaijani historians – from Ziya Bunyadov's ethno-linguistic paradigm and Mammadali Sharifli's empirically grounded analyses, to Abdulkarim Alizadeh's seminal investigations into Mongol-era disruptions and Yagub Mahmudov's nuanced explorations of socio-political resilience – the study illustrates how demographic processes are deeply embedded in broader socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations.

The historiography reveals a recurring theme: that demographic development in medieval Azerbaijan cannot be adequately understood without accounting for the complex entanglements of warfare, migration, environmental conditions, and governance. The works examined consistently emphasize the role of prolonged military conflict – be it the Mongol invasions, the Timurid-Aq Qoyunlu confrontations, or the protracted Safavid-Ottoman wars – as key disruptors of population stability and urban continuity. Yet, in contrast to this narrative, the historiography also foregrounds examples of demographic resilience and reconstitution, particularly in regions such as Shirvan, where relative political stability facilitated economic revitalization and population growth (Najaf, 2025).

Importantly, the article underscores the methodological advancements achieved in Azerbaijani historical scholarship, especially the integration of archaeological data, the use of Persian and Arabic primary texts, and the critical incorporation of European travel narratives. These historiographical developments have enabled a more nuanced reconstruction of demographic realities in the absence of systematic census data. The interdisciplinary approaches adopted by scholars such as Rauf Mammadov and Karim Shukurov reflect a maturing field that is increasingly attentive to both material and textual evidence.

By bridging historical demography with socio-political analysis, this study contributes to a more holistic understanding of medieval Azerbaijani history. It situates demographic change not as an isolated phenomenon, but as both a driver and a consequence of state formation, cultural integration, and geopolitical transformation. In doing so, it calls for a continued commitment to source-critical, multi-perspectival, and comparative approaches in future historiographical inquiry. The evolving narrative of Azerbaijan's medieval demography thus offers not only insights into the past, but also a methodological blueprint for exploring the intricate relationship between population dynamics and historical change across broader Eurasian contexts.

## Findings

Medieval Azerbaijan represented a diversified ethno-linguistic landscape shaped by Turkic migrations and Islamic cultural integration.

Nomadic-settled symbiosis influenced demographic growth, land distribution, and military structures.

Islamic socio-economic principles reinforced family values and fertility.

Silk Road commerce stimulated urbanization in cities like Baku, Ganja, and Shamakhi.

Warfare and natural events periodically reshaped settlement patterns.

## Novelty and Contribution

This study is the first systematic comparative historiographical assessment of medieval Azerbaijani demographic processes using both Eastern and Western academic perspectives. It emphasizes Islamic and Turkic frameworks influencing demographic behavior and policies.

**Ethical Considerations.** This research involves no human or animal subjects and relies solely on published academic literature.

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